



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE VORONOV PLOT

Yves Sente

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THE VORONOV PLOT

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Based on the characters of
EDGAR P. JACOBS

JANUARY 16. BAIKONUR COSMODROME, NEAR THE ARAL SEA, IN SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN. AS DAY IS ABOUT TO DAWN, THE SPACE LAUNCH FACILITY IS FULL OF BUSTLE. IN THE FRANTIC RACE FOR THE STARS THAT PITS THE UNITED STATES AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION, THE LATTER HAS GOTTEN A LEG UP... AND THE KREMLIN HAS GIVEN STRICT ORDERS FOR THAT ADVANTAGE TO BE MAINTAINED AT ALL COSTS.



INSIDE THE CONTROL ROOM, THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE. THE VOICE OF PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN QUAVERS WITH BARELY RESTRAINED ANGER...

General Ufa! I must repeat once again that our astronomers have located several meteor showers in the past few days. We must postpone this launch. The risk is too great. We can wait a week and...

Professor Ilyushin!



I relayed your worries to Moscow, Professor. The answer was very clear: Delaying this program—even by as little as an hour—is out of the question! You may be heading a scientific team, but I'll remind you that I'm the program leader here—ME! Therefore, this discussion is over. My area surveillance teams are in position. It's now up to you!



Very well. I yield to your orders.



Comrade Gurov! Where do we stand?

The launch pad has been evacuated, Professor. Everything is ready.



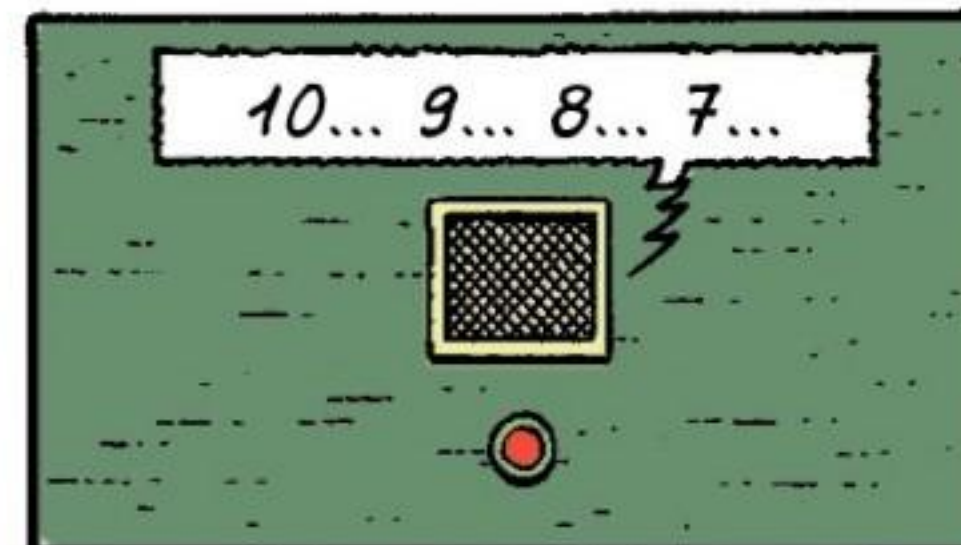
Perfect! Everyone in position. I'm going to start the countdown.



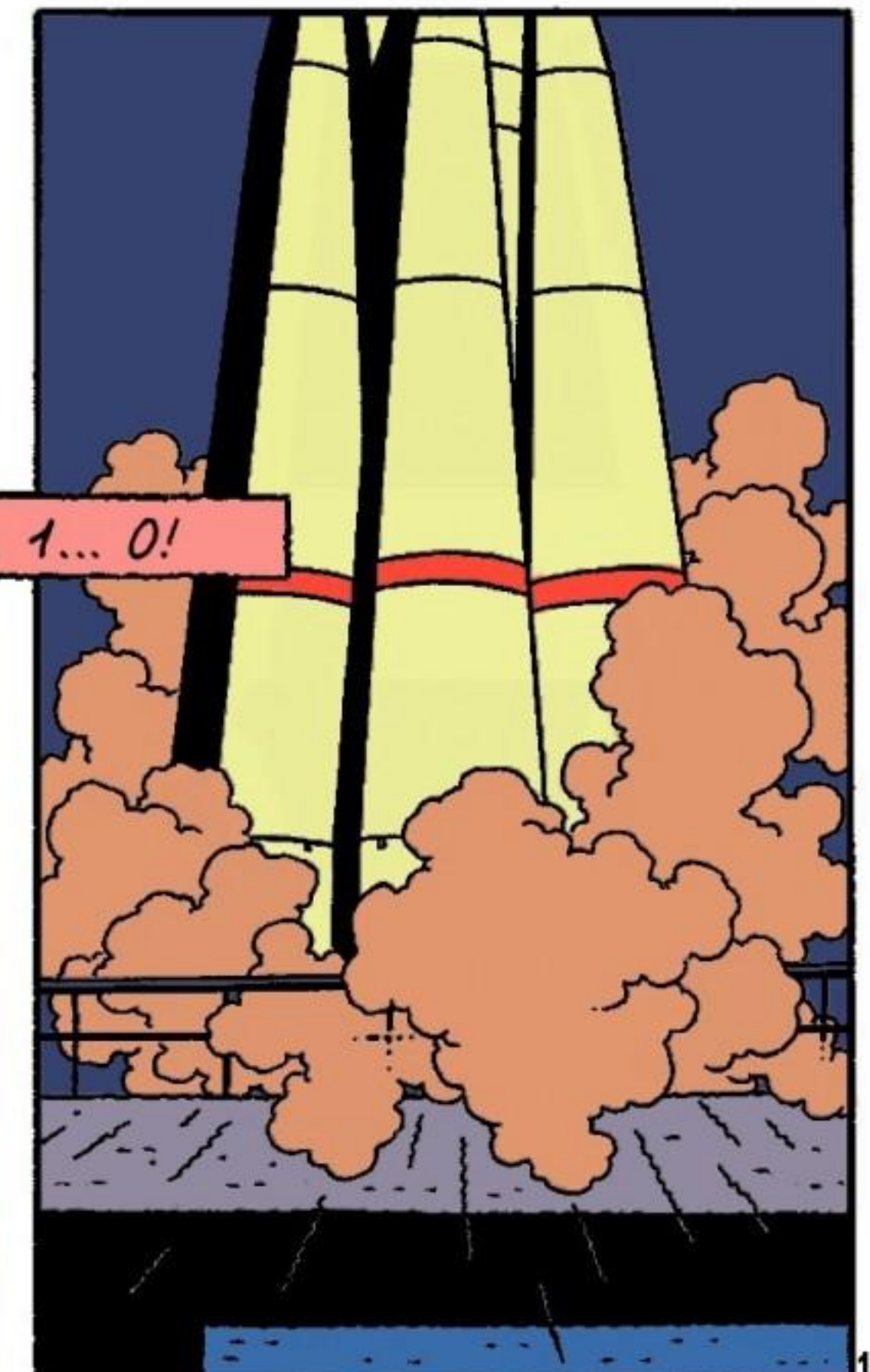
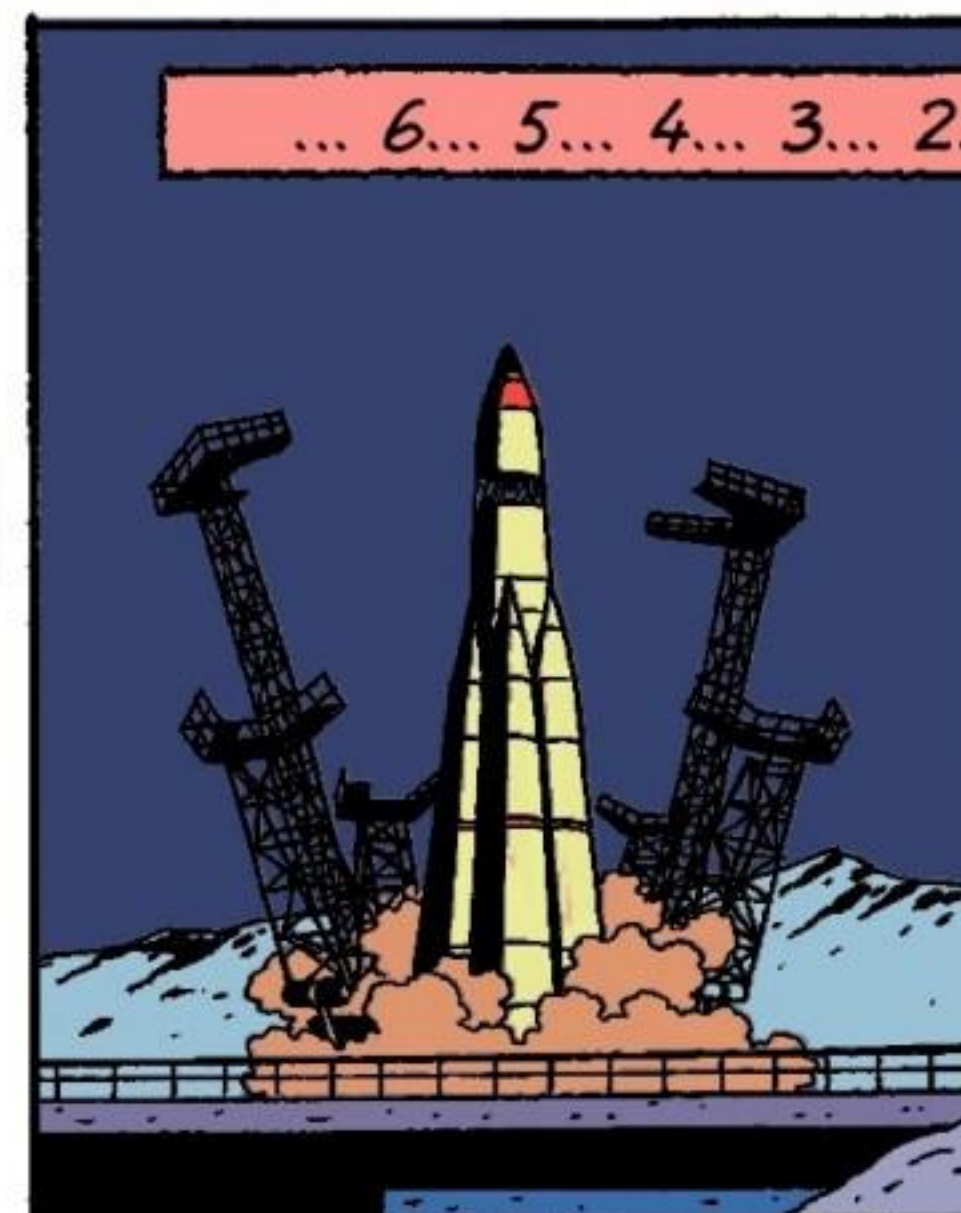
PRAYING SILENTLY FOR LUCK TO SMILE ON "HIS" ROCKET—AND THE HARD WORK OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS TO MEET WITH SUCCESS—PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN FIRMLY PUSHES THE BUTTON THAT TRIGGERS THE LAUNCH SEQUENCE.



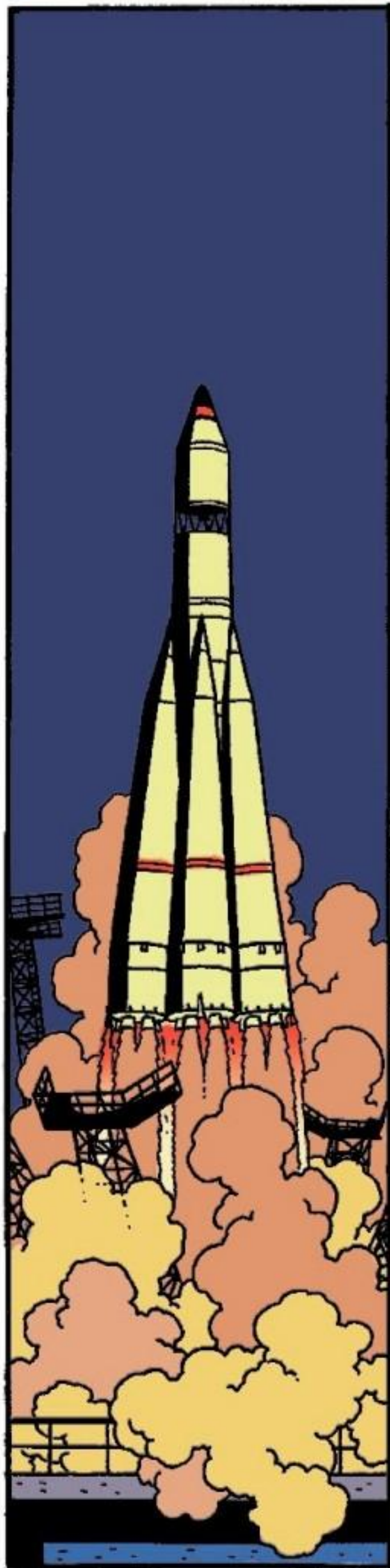
10... 9... 8... 7...



... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... 0!



WITH A ROAR LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE, THE FIVE ENGINES—EACH PRODUCING OVER FIVE TONNES OF THRUST—MAJESTICALLY TEAR THE ROCKET FROM EARTH'S GRAVITY AND LAUNCH IT TOWARDS THE STARRY VOID.



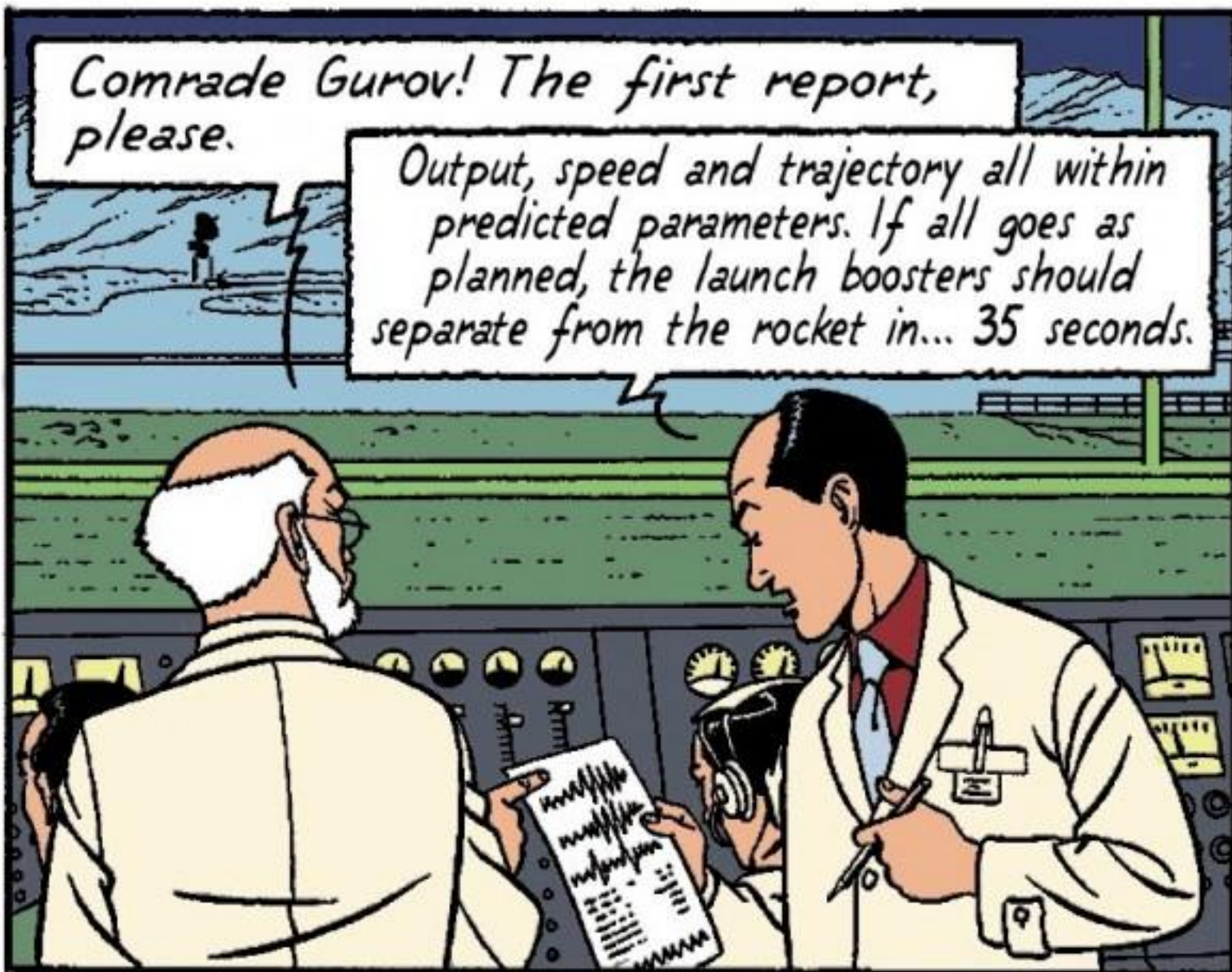
You see, Professor! A perfect take-off! You should have more confidence in yourself. Everything will go well, as usual!

That's precisely the difference between us, General. I'm wary of the usual...

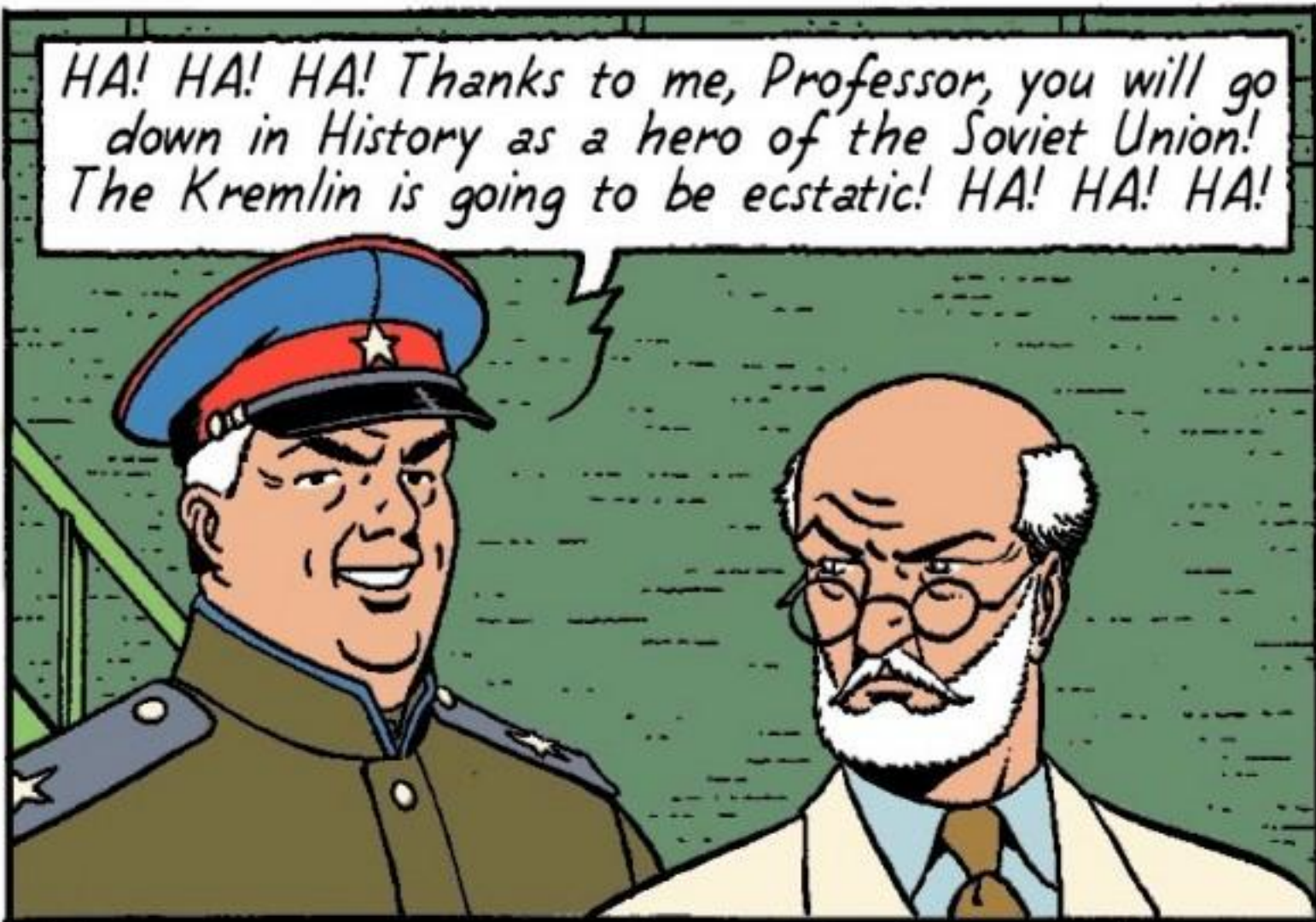


Comrade Gurov! The first report, please.

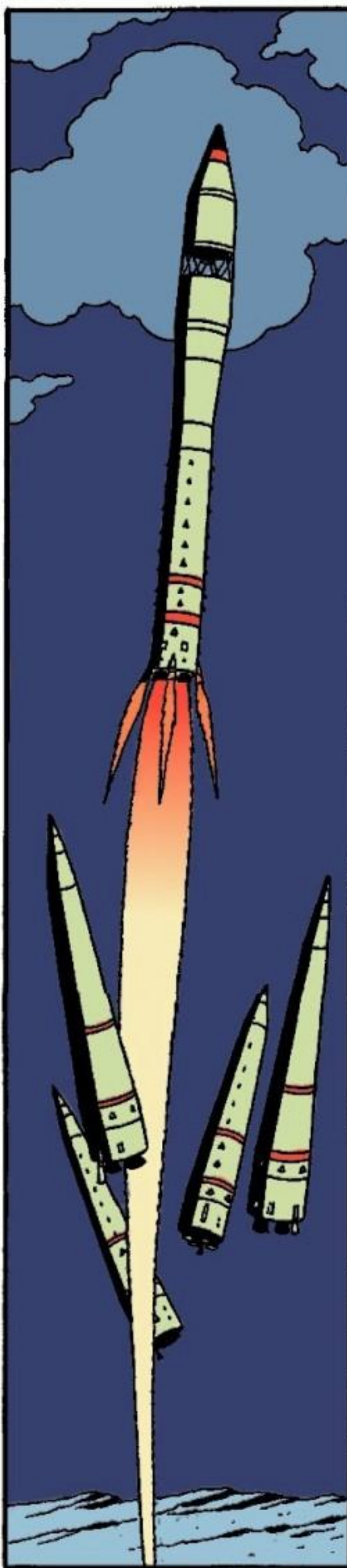
Output, speed and trajectory all within predicted parameters. If all goes as planned, the launch boosters should separate from the rocket in... 35 seconds.



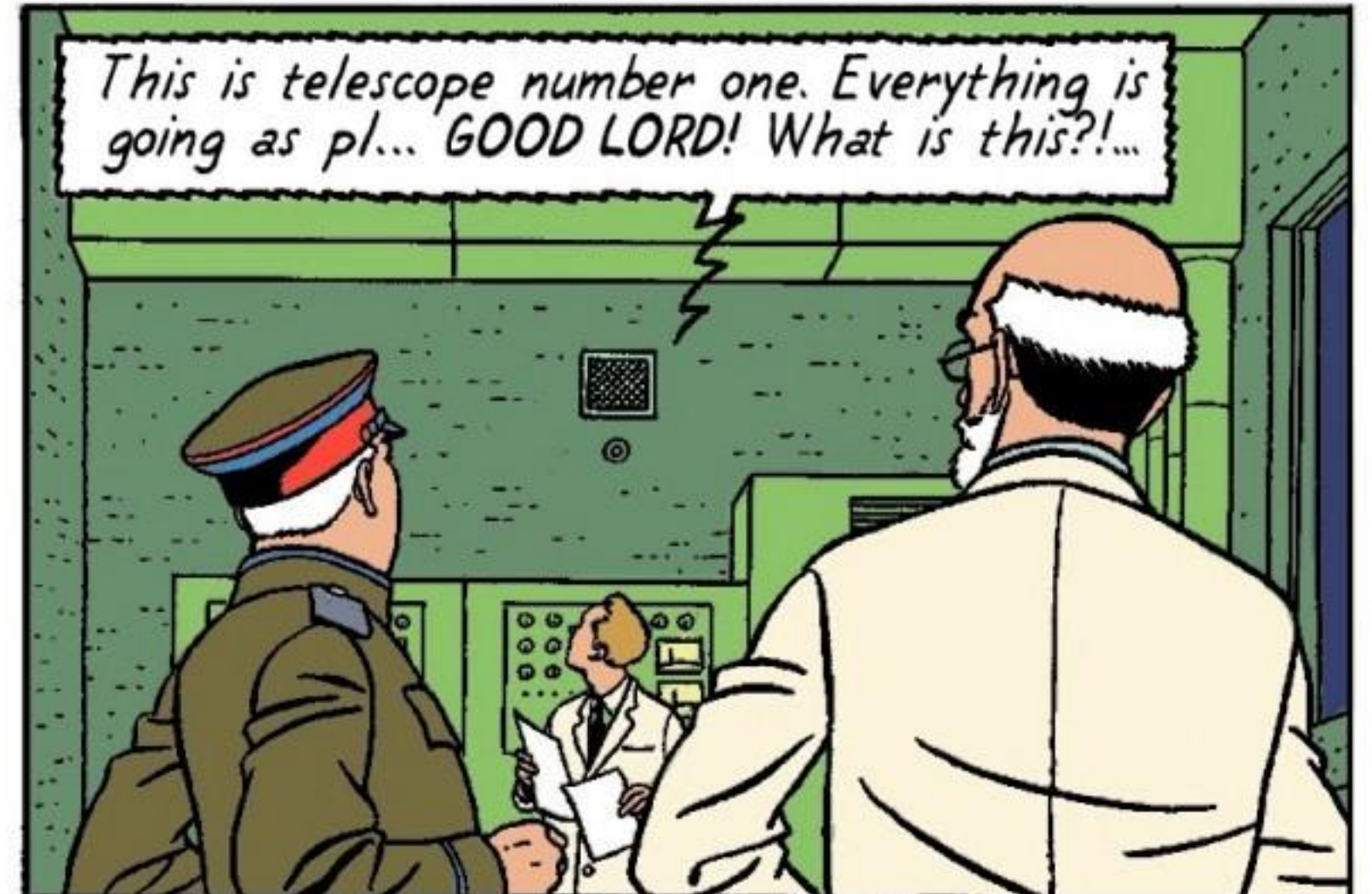
HA! HA! HA! Thanks to me, Professor, you will go down in History as a hero of the Soviet Union! The Kremlin is going to be ecstatic! HA! HA! HA!



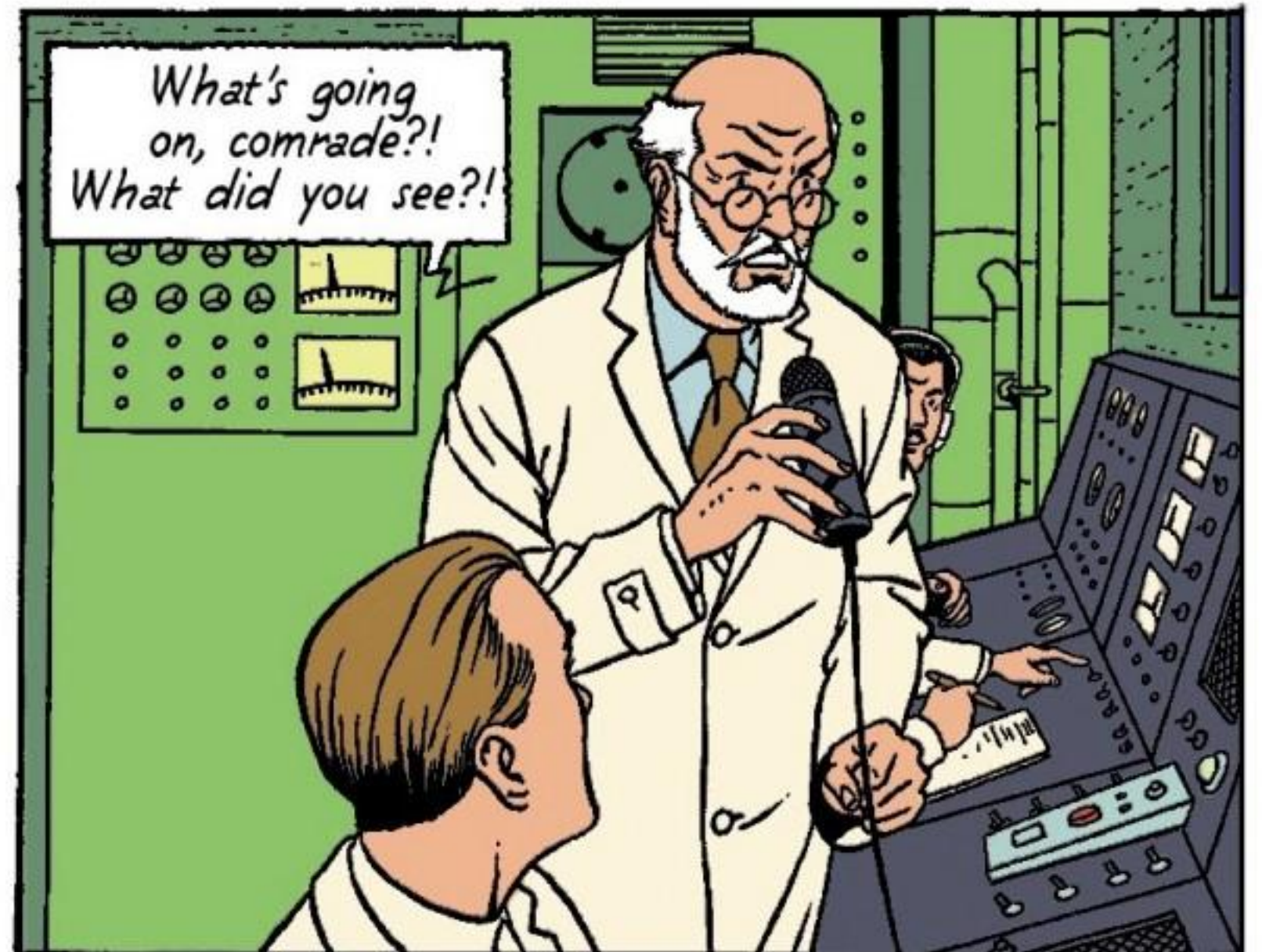
AT THE APPOINTED TIME, THE FOUR BOOSTER ENGINES DROP AWAY FROM THE ROCKET BODY, LEAVING IT TO CONTINUE ITS FLIGHT TOWARDS INFINITY.



This is telescope number one. Everything is going as pl... GOOD LORD! What is this?!



What's going on, comrade?! What did you see?!



Another meteor shower, Professor! They're coming from behind the rocket!



The meteorites are faster, but the rocket has started to curve on its trajectory...



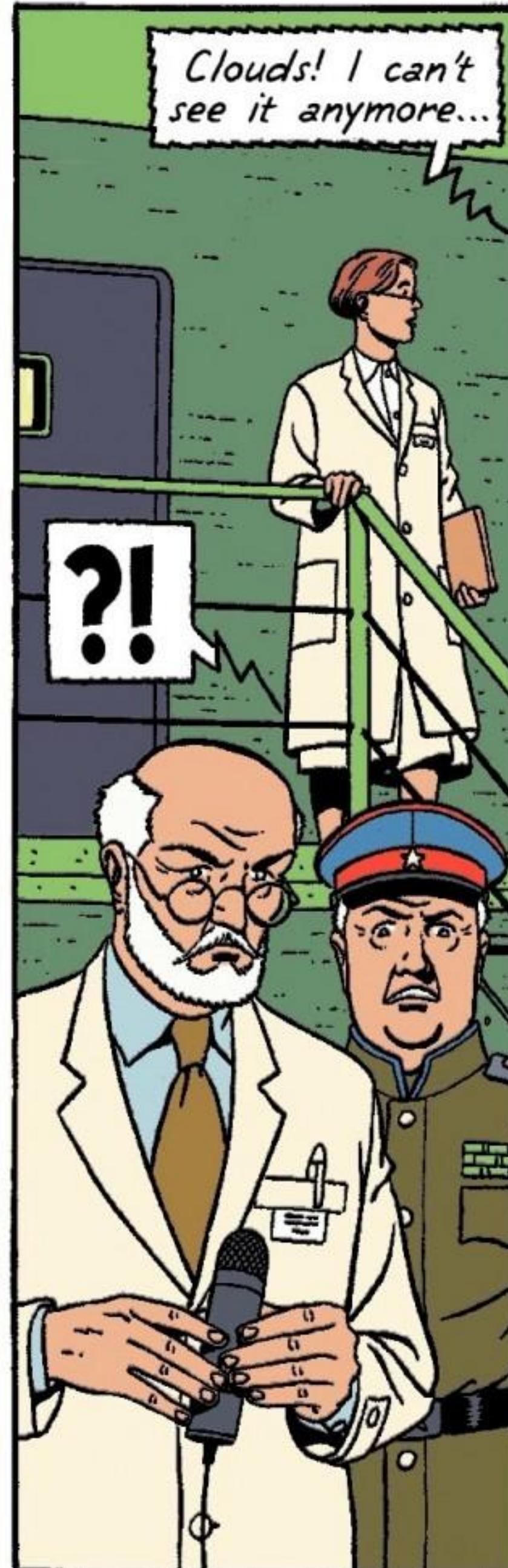
There's still a chance that it will avoid collision...



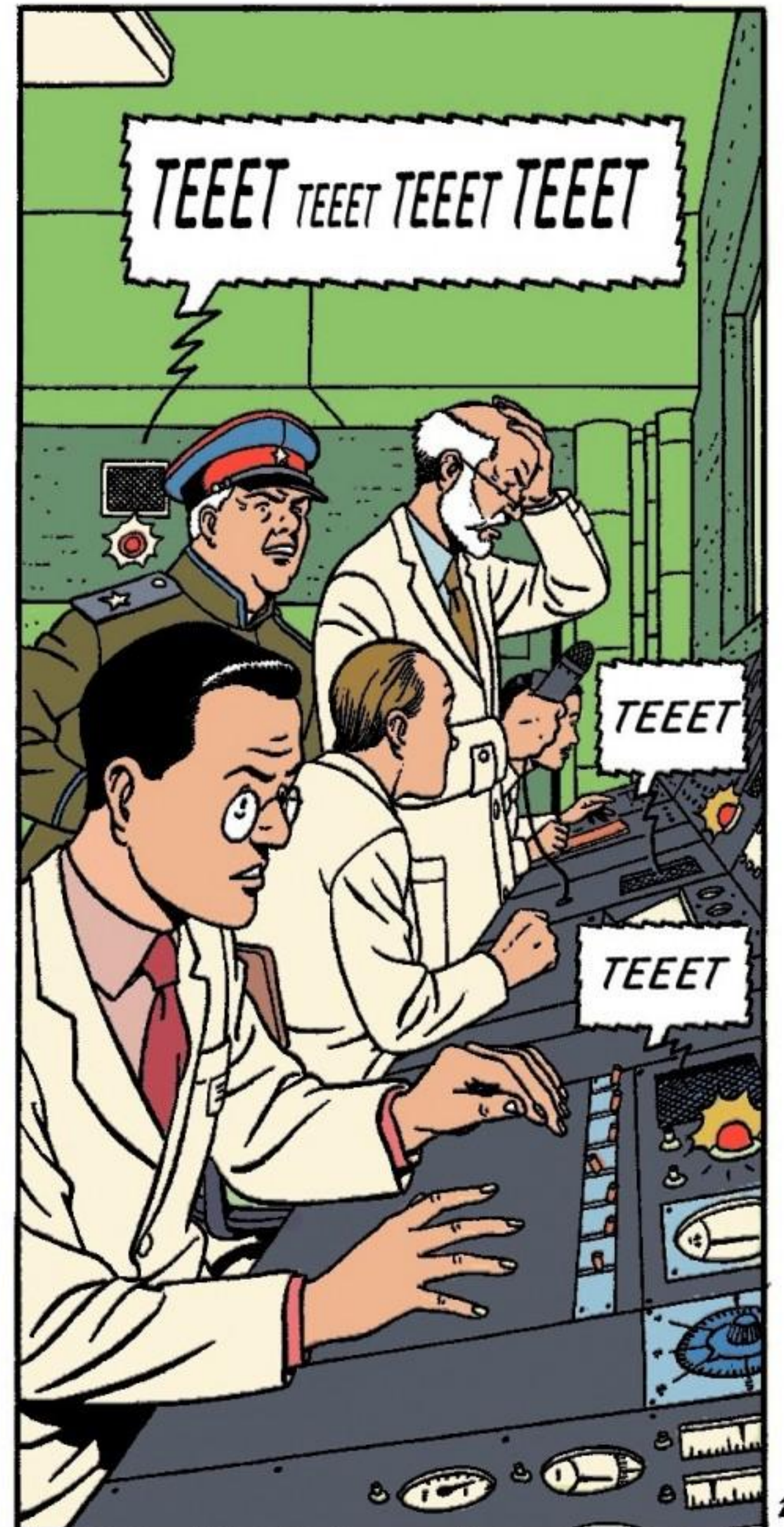
I think the meteorites are going to miss it... OH! NO!

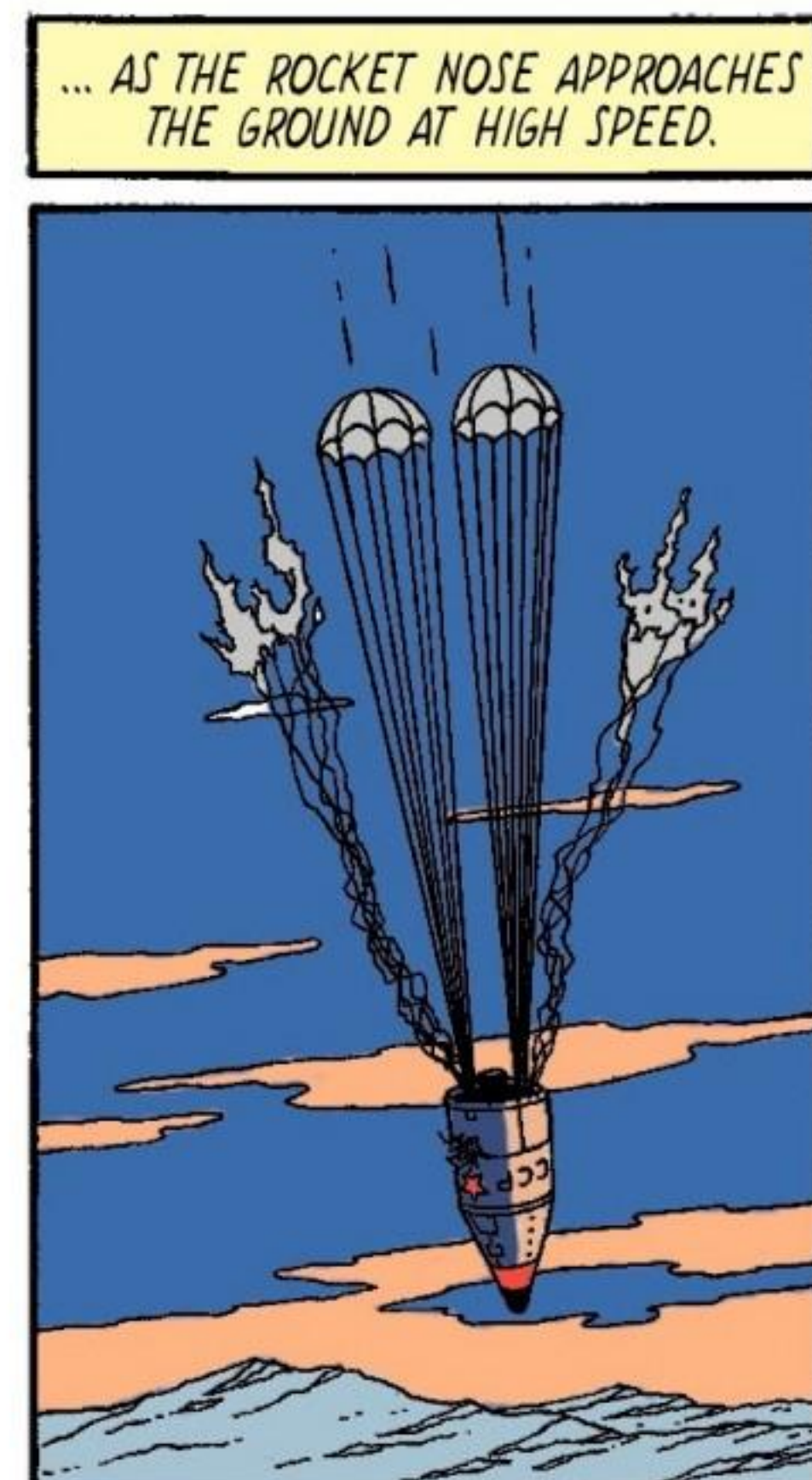
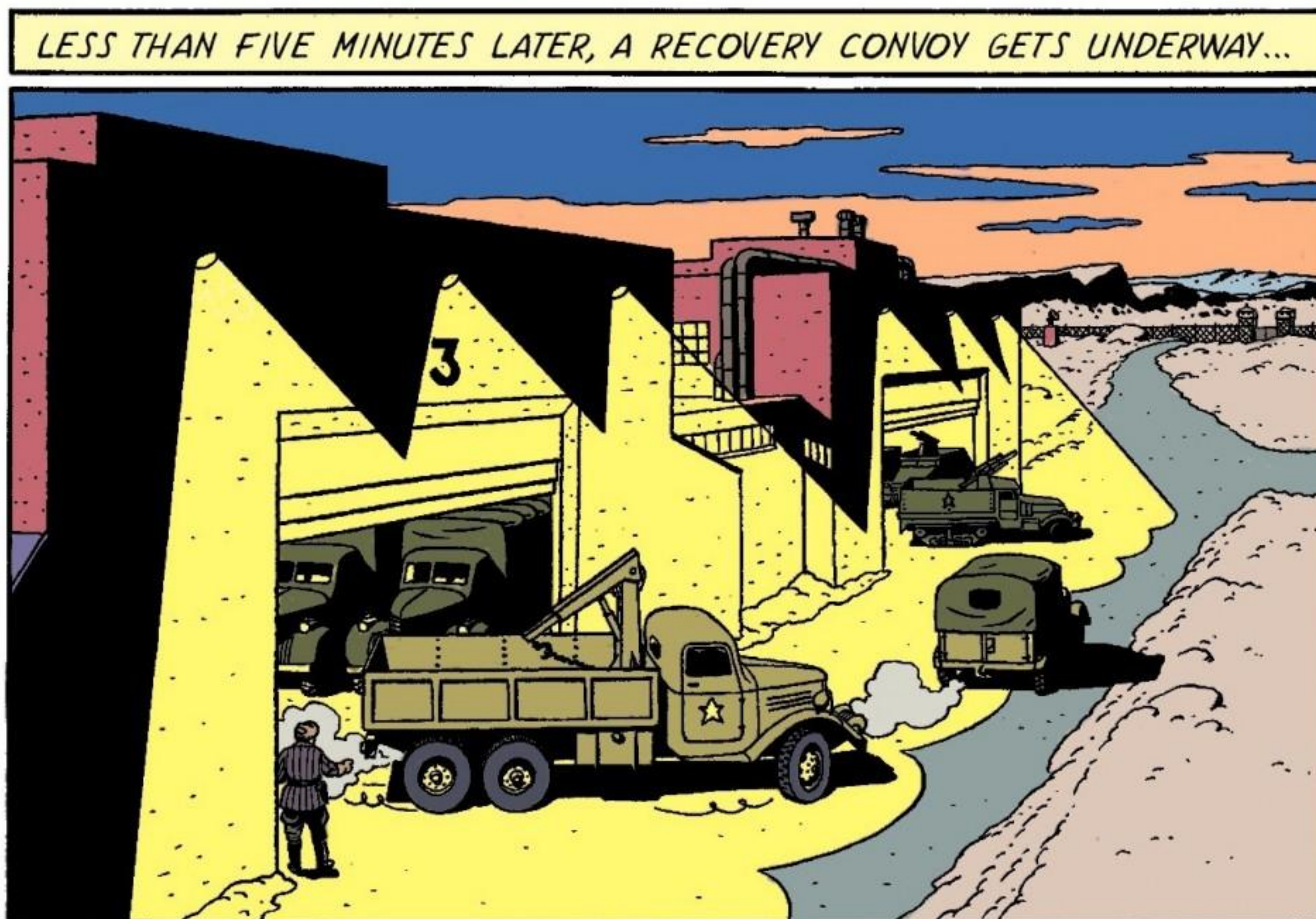
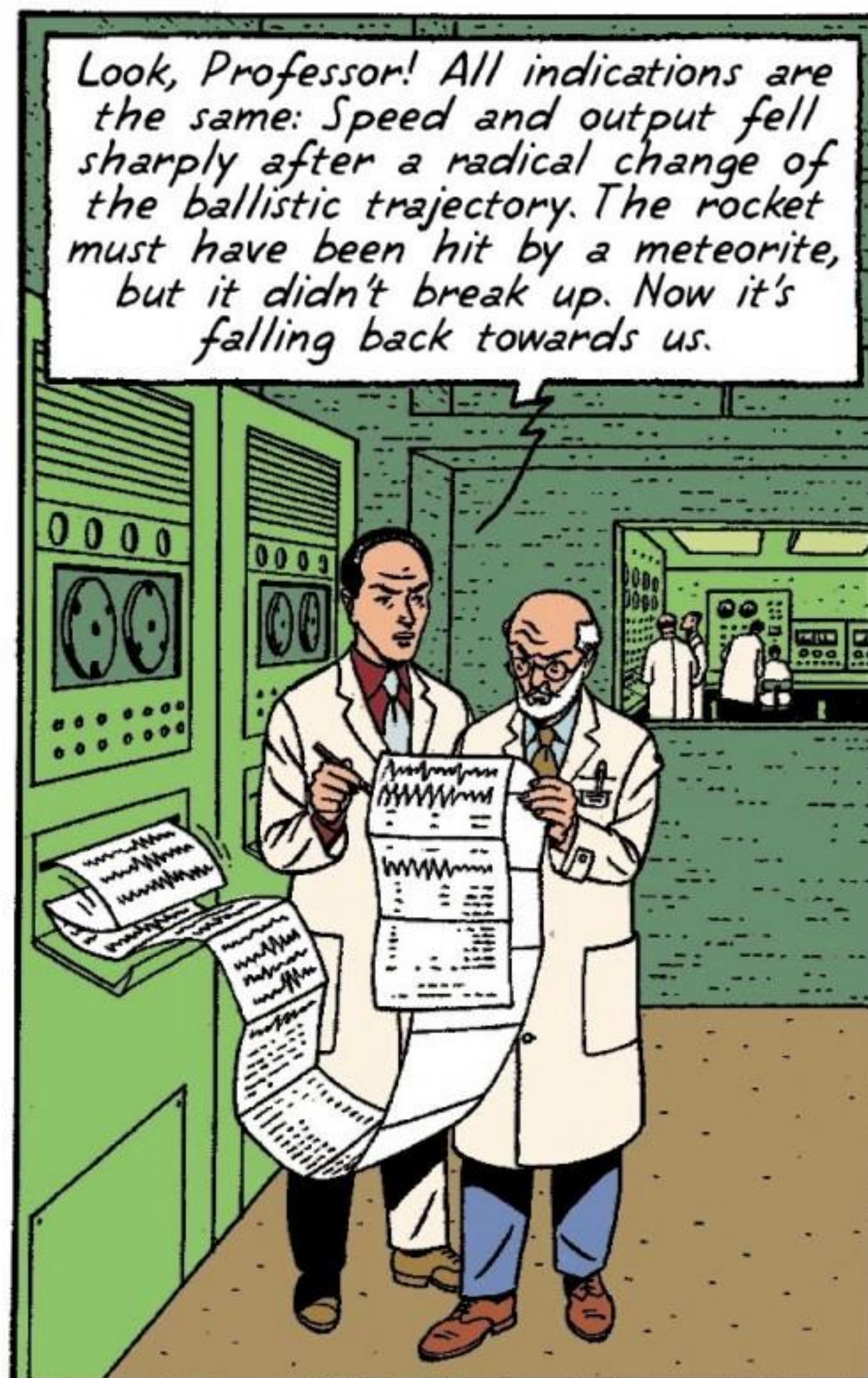
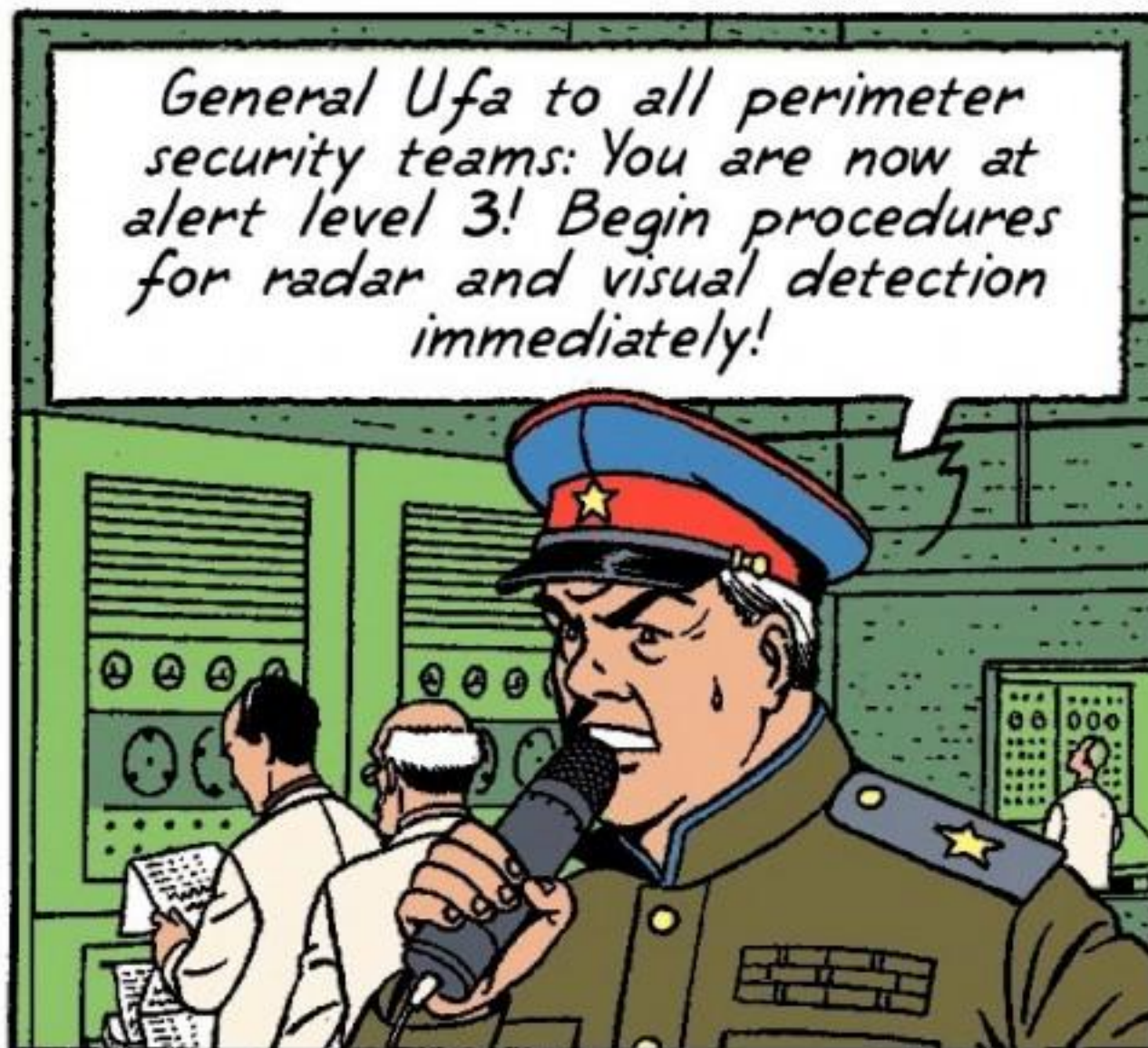


Clouds! I can't see it anymore...

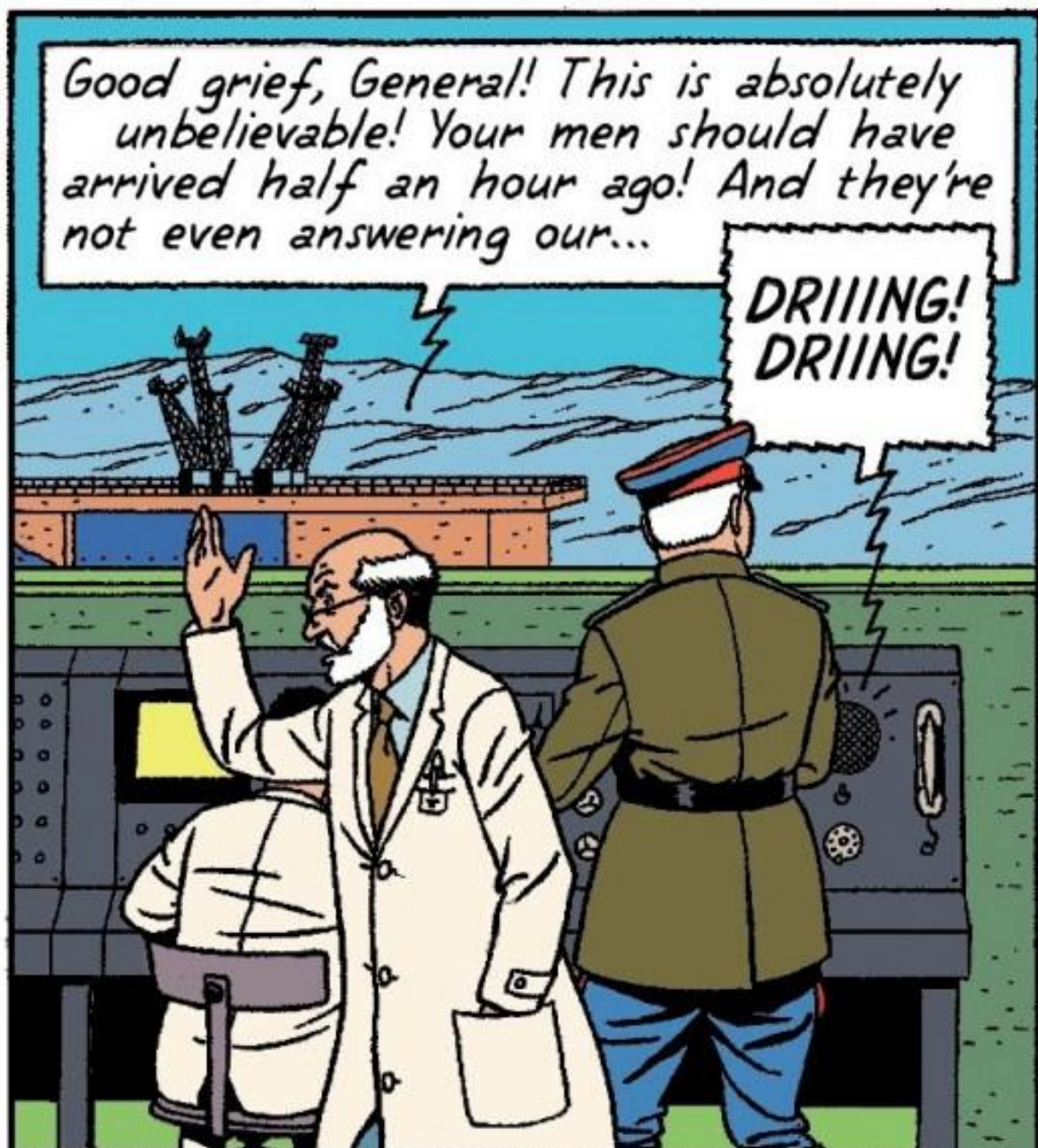


TEEET TEEET TEEET TEEET





TWO HOURS LATER, IN BAIKONUR'S CONTROL BUNKER, TENSION IS ALMOST PALPABLE. PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN GIVES VOICE TO THE IMPATIENCE HE'S MANAGED TO KEEP IN CHECK UNTIL NOW...

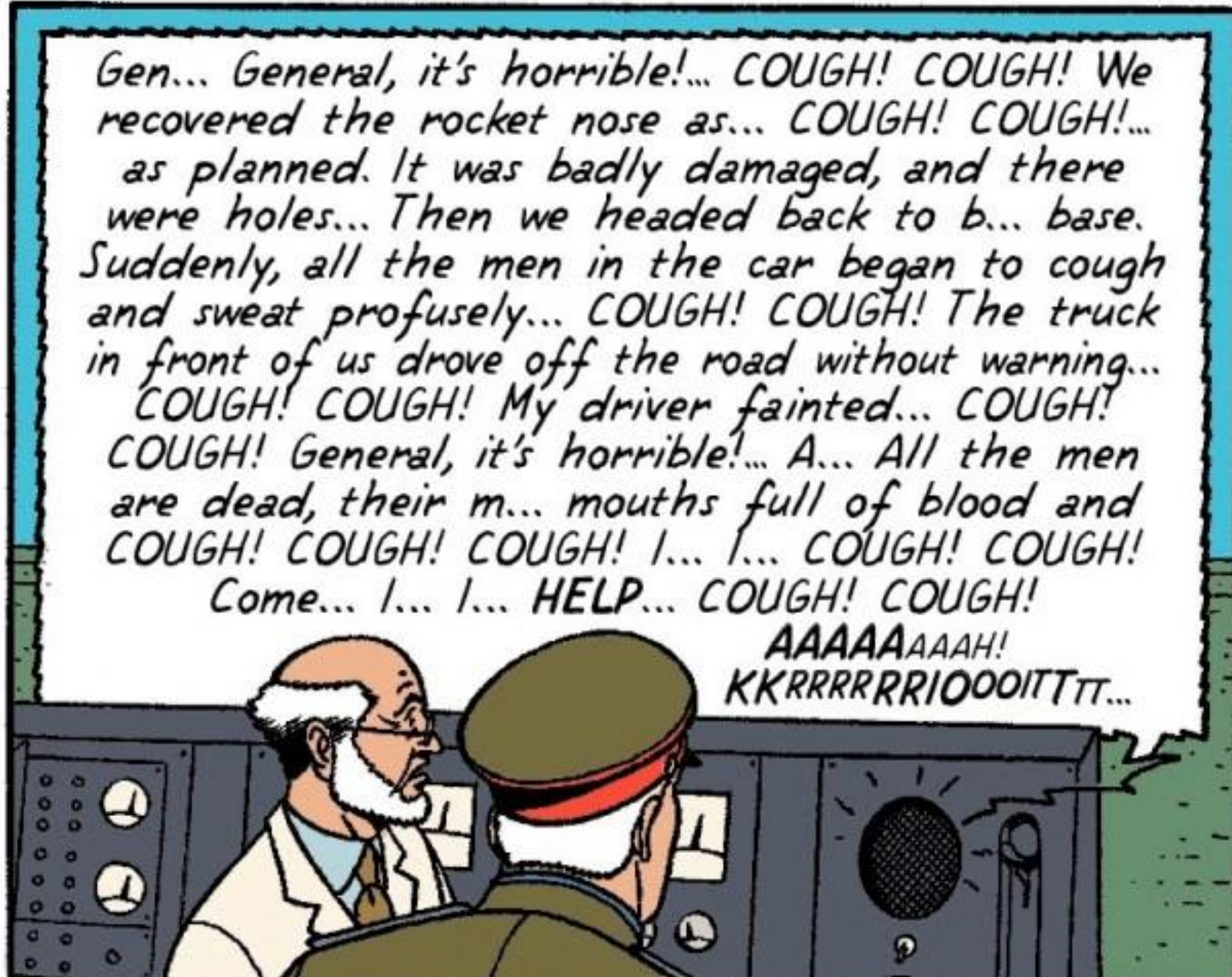


Hello? Lieutenant Crimyev? Where the devil are you?!

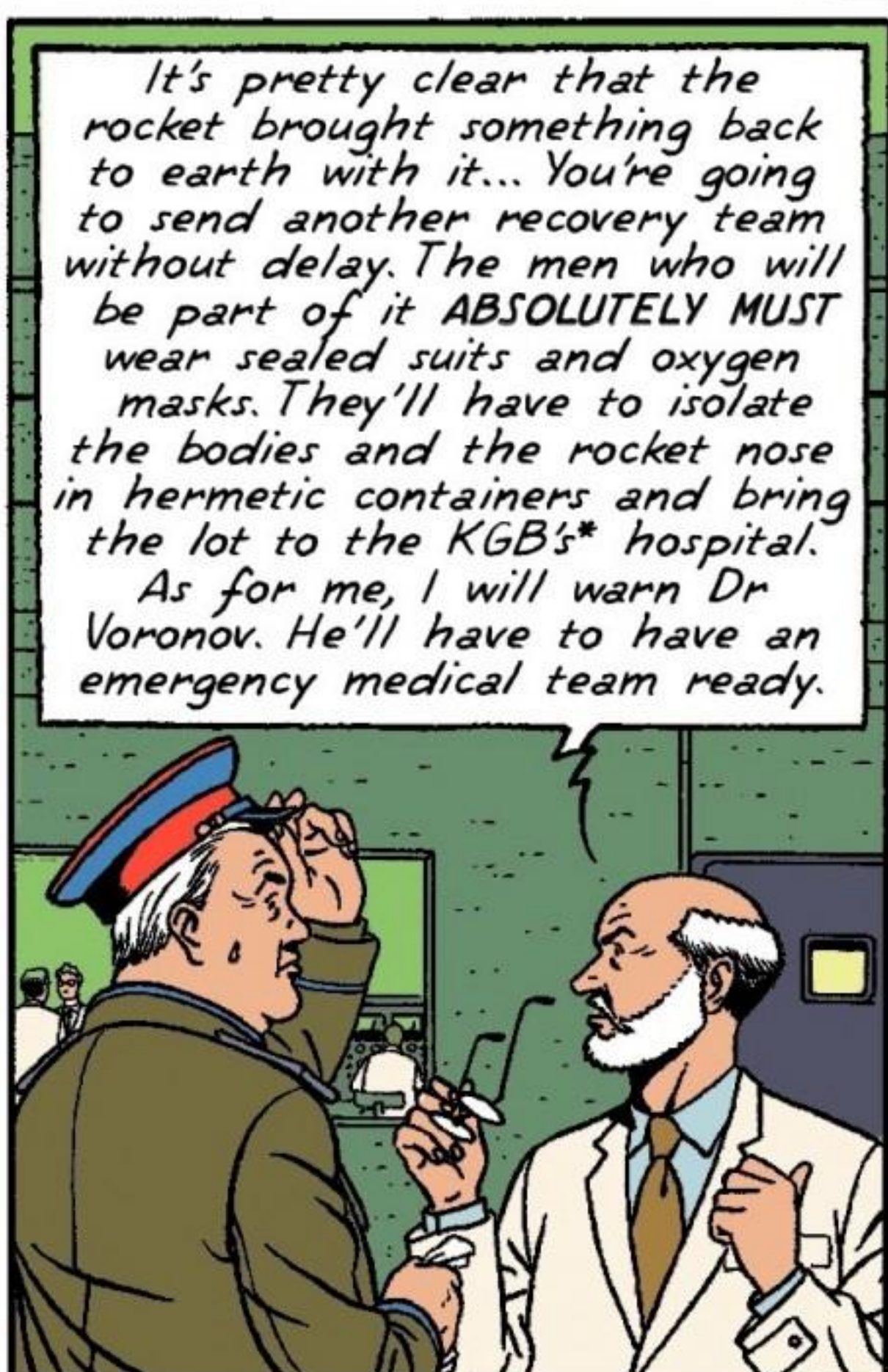
COUGH! COUGH!

AS THE LIEUTENANT'S VOICE FADES, A HEAVY SILENCE SETTLES IN THE CONTROL ROOM. THE OFFICER'S INCREDIBLE STORY HAS LEFT THE COMPANY SPEECHLESS. ONLY UFA'S ANGUISHED CALLS CUT THROUGH THE GENERAL ASTONISHMENT.

What happened?... What could possibly have happened over there, Professor?



Gen... General, it's horrible!... COUGH! COUGH! We recovered the rocket nose as... COUGH! COUGH!... as planned. It was badly damaged, and there were holes... Then we headed back to base. Suddenly, all the men in the car began to cough and sweat profusely... COUGH! COUGH! The truck in front of us drove off the road without warning... COUGH! COUGH! My driver fainted... COUGH! COUGH! General, it's horrible!... A... All the men are dead, their m... mouths full of blood and COUGH! COUGH! COUGH! I... I... COUGH! COUGH! Come... I... I... HELP... COUGH! COUGH! AAAAAAAAH! KKKRRRRRIOOOITTT...



It's pretty clear that the rocket brought something back to earth with it... You're going to send another recovery team without delay. The men who will be part of it ABSOLUTELY MUST wear sealed suits and oxygen masks. They'll have to isolate the bodies and the rocket nose in hermetic containers and bring the lot to the KGB's* hospital. As for me, I will warn Dr Voronov. He'll have to have an emergency medical team ready.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, AS A WINTER SUN IS ABOUT TO RISE OVER THE KAZAKH DESERT, A TEAM OF SOLDIERS BOARDS A SECOND CONVOY.



Hello? Dr Voronov? This is Ilyushin speaking...

We are on level three alert. In less than two hours, I will have need of your hospital's services...



You know that the men of the KGB are at this base's disposal, Professor... even if you don't like us much...

I'm listening...



WHILE, AT THE COSMODROME PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN AND DR VORONOV ORGANISE THE DELIVERY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ROCKET AND THE BODIES FROM THE FIRST CONVOY, THE SECOND EXPEDITION IS NEARING ITS OBJECTIVE AT HIGH SPEED...

AFTER DRIVING 35 MILES OVER BUMPY TRACKS, THE RESCUE TEAM HAS REACHED THE FIRST CONVOY—JUST SITTING THERE IN FRIGHTENING SILENCE...

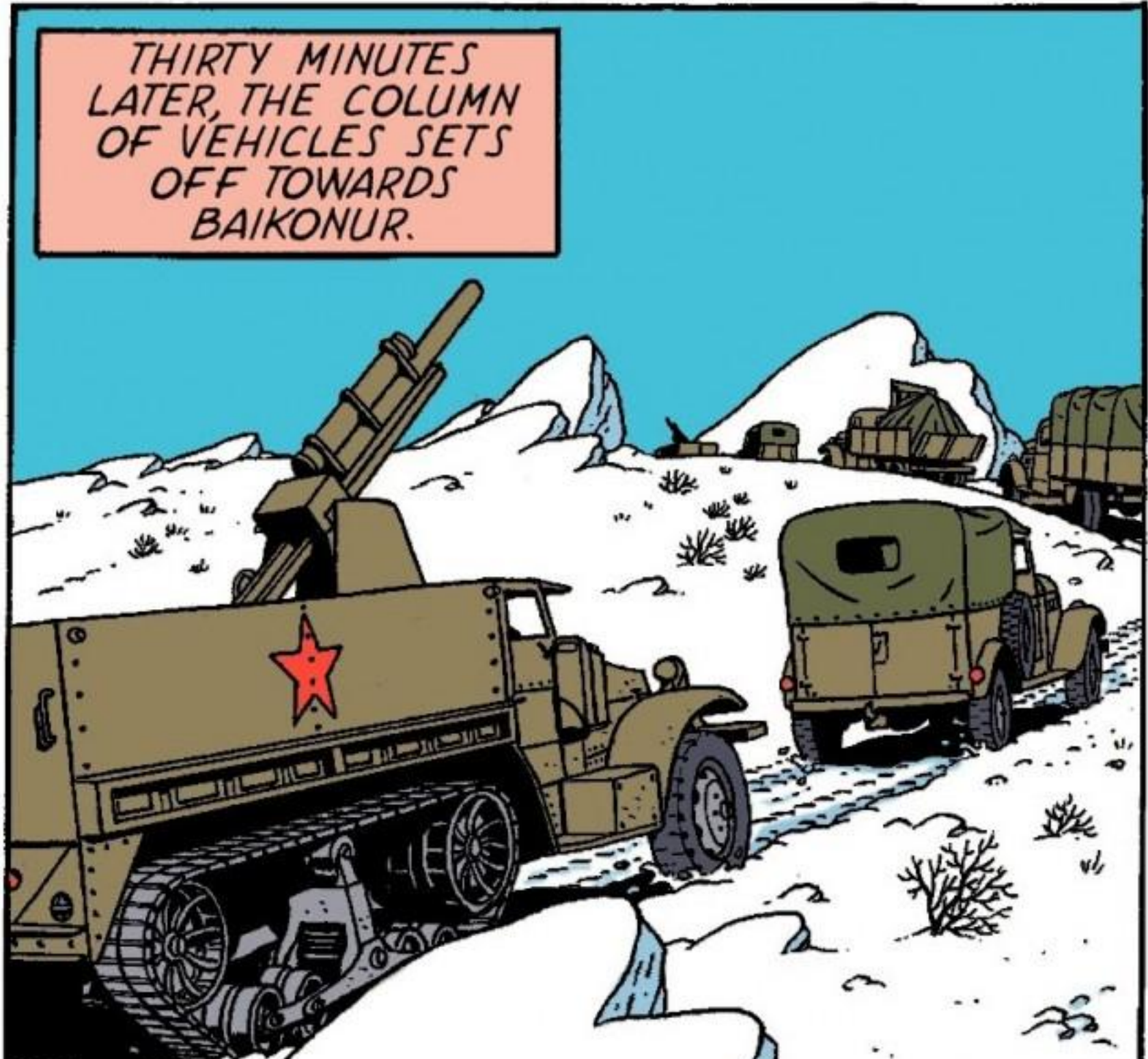


Lieutenant! Look!... This is horrible! Our... Our comrades... They...

Pull yourself together, soldier! You know what could happen to you if you vomit in your mask!



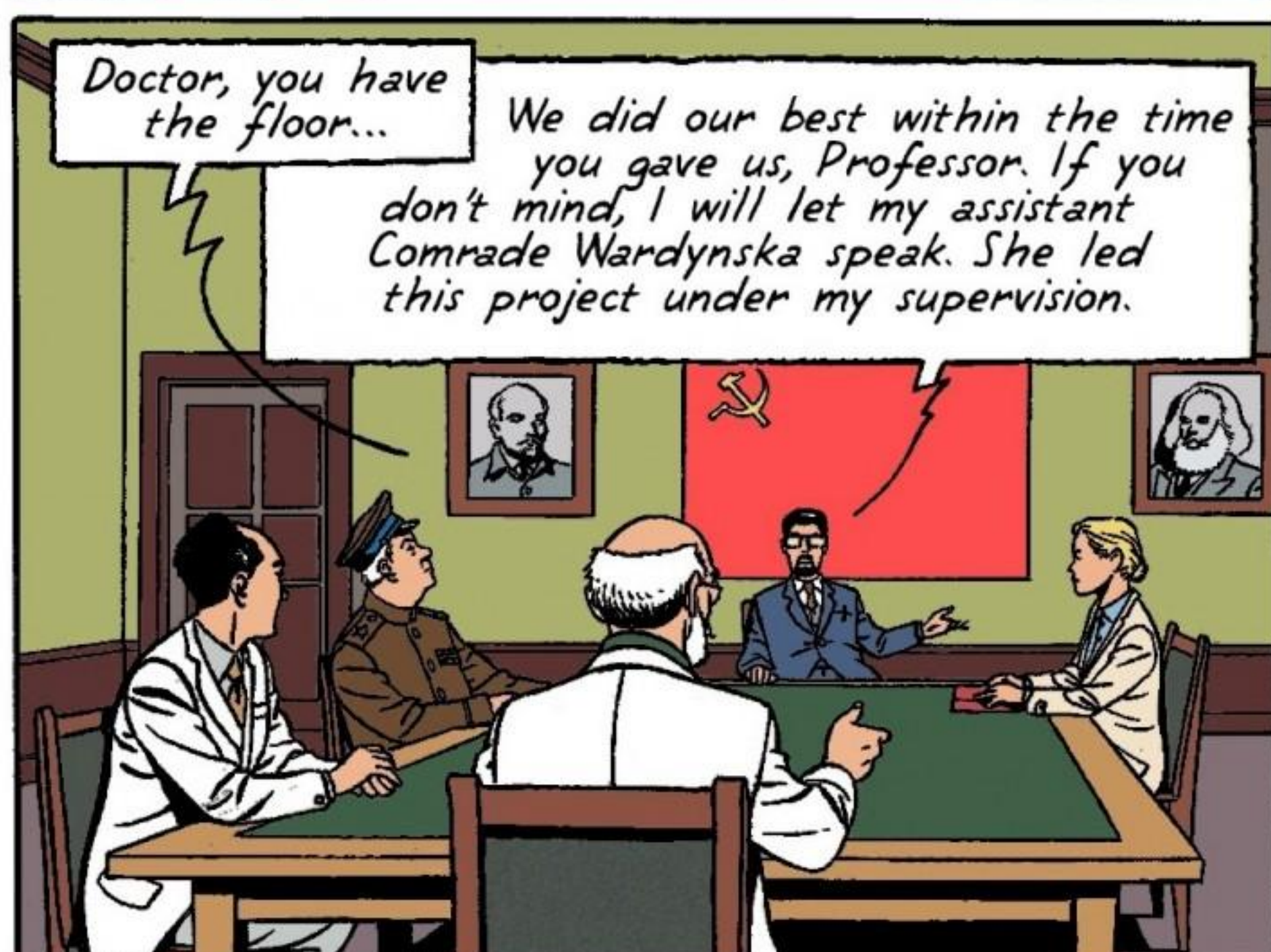
Everyone knows what we have to do. Raise the crane truck with the half-tracks' winches. Put the bodies in the other truck and cover them hermetically, as well as the rocket. After that we'll divide up driving duties for all vehicles. Now get to it, on the double!



THIRTY MINUTES LATER, THE COLUMN OF VEHICLES SETS OFF TOWARDS BAIKONUR.

*KOMITET GOSUDARSTVENNOY BEZOPASNOSTI (SOVIET INTELLIGENCE)

FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AFTER THE ROCKET HAS BEEN RETURNED TO THE BASE, PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN HAS CONVENED A CRISIS COMMITTEE TO LISTEN TO DR VORONOV'S REPORT.



Doctor, you have the floor...

We did our best within the time you gave us, Professor. If you don't mind, I will let my assistant Comrade Wardynska speak. She led this project under my supervision.

The results of our initial analyses clearly show that our soldiers were killed by a bacterial strain unknown to Earth. They were exposed to this devastating germ when they came into contact with the rocket nose—which, no doubt, had been infected during its short flight. Simply inhaling this bacterium instantaneously causes, in a human adult, a haemorrhagic fever, which immediately begins to destroy the body's tissue—starting with the lungs...



The subject begins to cough heavily. And, as his blood seeps into his entire body, the circulatory system empties... until the heart stops. That's about it for a simplified version of the bacterial attack. We do not know how it takes place, or how to stop it.

Comrade Wardynska!

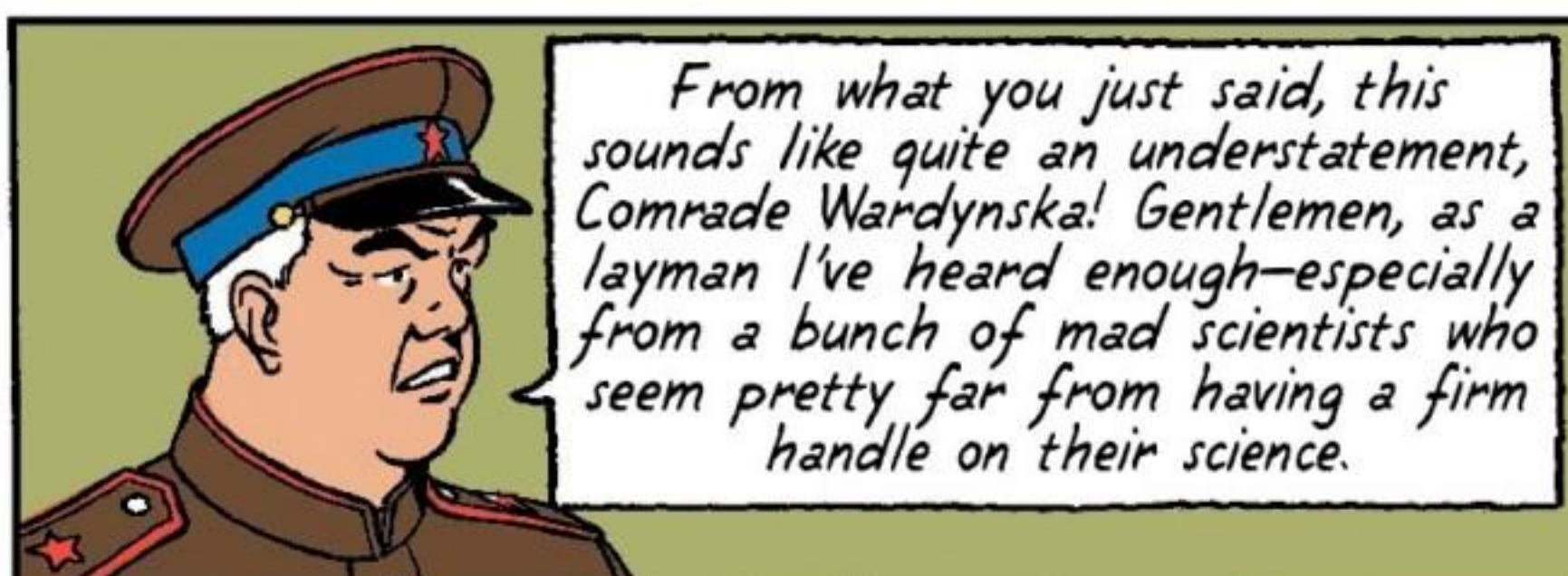


Are you seriously telling me that killer bacteria can just drift happily through space, waiting for a rocket to pass by, then grab on to it and arrive on Earth intact?!

Absolutely, General. A distinguishing characteristic of bacteria is that they can form spores—a kind of internal shell that protects them. These allow the organisms to survive for thousands of years if needed, without food or considerations of temperature. If the bacteria are embedded into a meteorite and that particular rock collides with our rocket, then anything is possible. Depending on their mutagenic potential, the destruction of the shell—combined with such factors as exposure to the void, pressure, heat, etc.—could easily turn those bacteria into merciless killing machines. This is how it is... There are still so many things we don't know about space.



From what you just said, this sounds like quite an understatement, Comrade Wardynska! Gentlemen, as a layman I've heard enough—especially from a bunch of mad scientists who seem pretty far from having a firm handle on their science.



Just before this meeting, I received explicit orders from Moscow. Officially, this incident never happened. Therefore, we are going to bury it, literally and figuratively. I want the rocket nose, the bodies and all documents relating to this business to be burned and buried 150 feet belowground by nightfall! Professor Ilyushin, get back to work immediately. You'll have to make up for this failure before the end of this year. Any questions?



WITHOUT GIVING THE STUNNED SCIENTISTS ANY CHANCE TO PROTEST, GENERAL UFA LEAVES THE ROOM. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIS COLLEAGUES' STUPEFACTION, DR VORONOV LEANS TOWARDS HIS ASSISTANT.



Gather all your notes and meet me in my office.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, IN VORONOV'S OFFICE...

You've done well, Nastasia. Now, tell me about the details in the file that didn't seem to hold much interest for those duraks* at the base.



AS THE YOUNG WOMAN BEGINS HER EXPLANATION, THE DOCTOR DISCREETLY PRESSES A BUTTON HIDDEN ON THE UNDERSIDE OF HIS DESK.

The bacteria have enormous mutagenic potential. Probably airborne when they arrived on the rocket nose, they are now transmitted only through the blood and saliva of the subject they inhabit. Moreover, our experiments on lab rats have revealed something surprising: These bacteria can survive inside beings of all ages but only attack adults. We still don't know why...



A SPY HOLE DISCREETLY LOCATED IN A PORTRAIT OPENS QUIETLY TO REVEAL THE SINISTER EYE...

Young rats... Very interesting. Is it possible that children could be immune to these bacteria even as they carry them?



... OF A PERSON WHO DOESN'T MISS A WORD OF THE CONVERSATION...

Further experiments alone could have told us that. But since General Ufa forbade that...

General Ufa has nothing to say inside MY hospital. Therefore, I intend to continue this study.



... OR THE TERRIFIED EXPRESSION OF THE YOUNG ASSISTANT.

Before we give back the General's corpses and rocket, you will please preserve 10 samples of these bacteria and lock them up in Lab A. That's an order, Comrade Wardynska.



*DURAKS: IDIOTS



LONDON, THE EVENING
OF MARCH THE 25TH

AROUND 6 PM, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE,
CHIEF OF M15—THE FAMOUS BRITISH
COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE SERVICE—PRESENTS
HIMSELF TO THE SECRETARY OF HIS
EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE
COLLEAGUE, COMMANDER WILLIAM
STEELE OF M16.

Good evening, Miss Pound. I'm here to
meet with the
Commander.

We were expecting
you, Captain. Please
follow me.



Thanks for coming so quickly, Francis.
How are you?

Very good, William,
thank you.

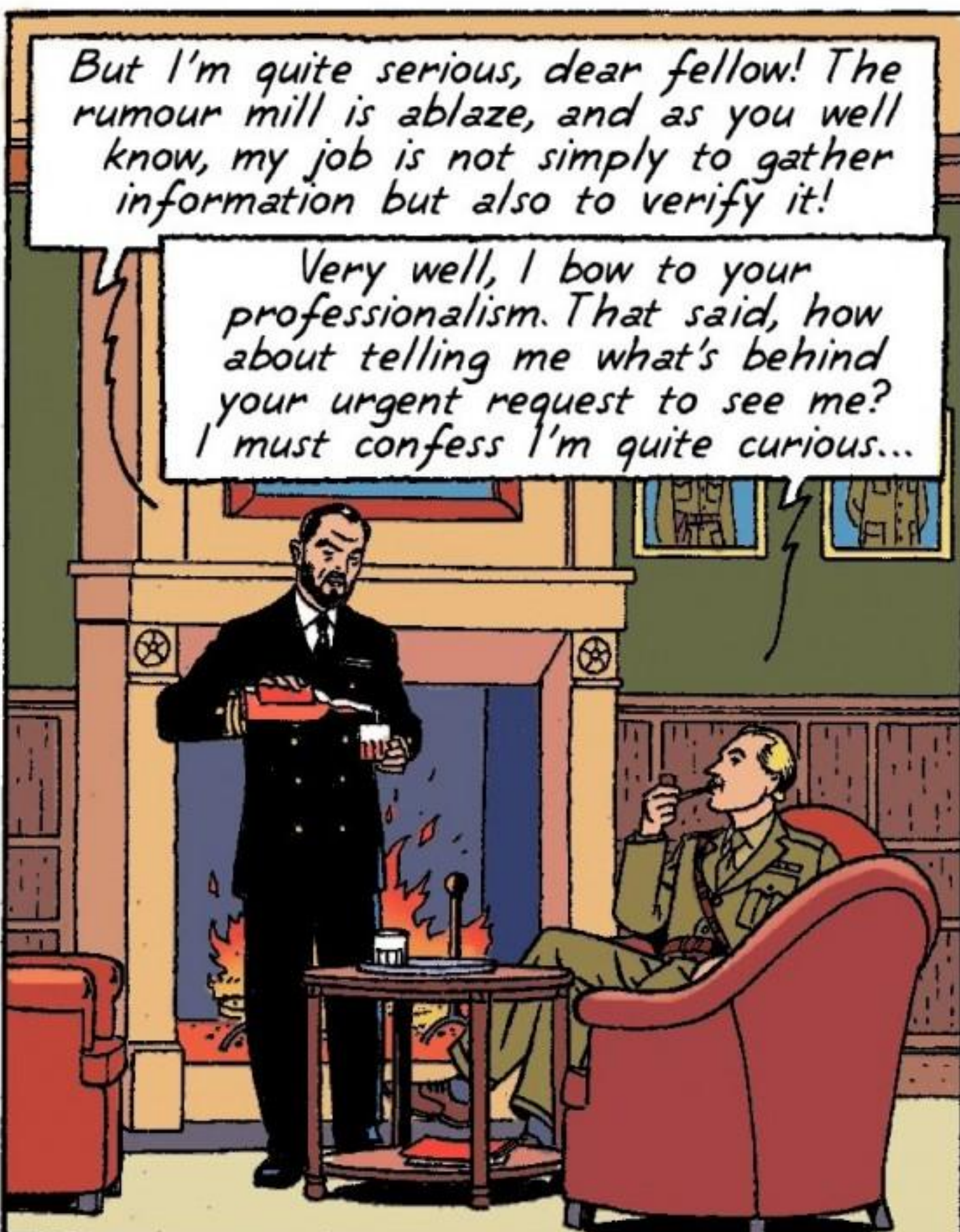


Thank you, Miss Pound.
You may leave us now.



HA! HA! HA! Dear
Miss Pound! Do you
know that she's very
much smitten with
your charm and the
fame you've acquired?

Come now, William,
don't joke!



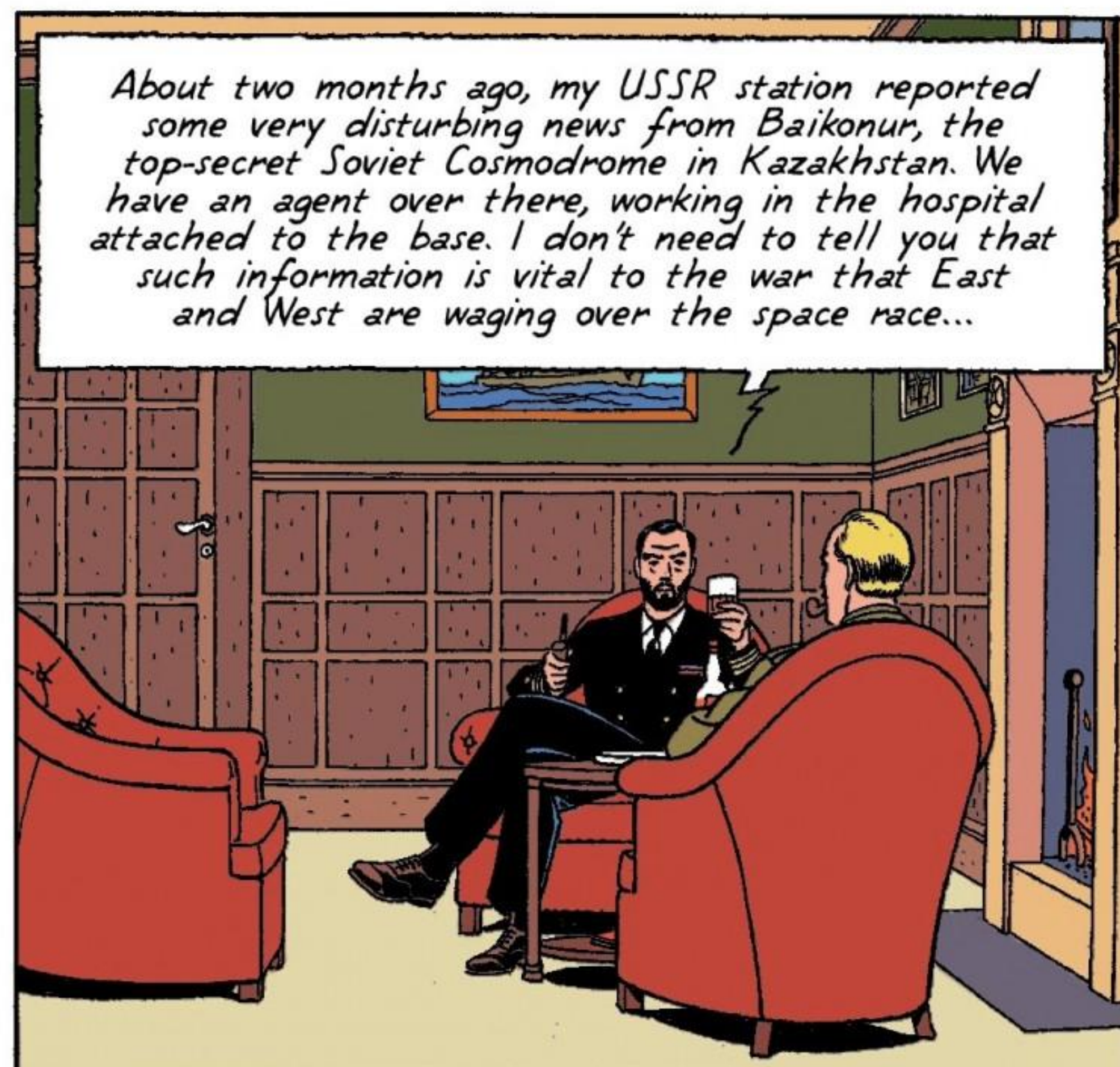
But I'm quite serious, dear fellow! The
rumour mill is ablaze, and as you well
know, my job is not simply to gather
information but also to verify it!

Very well, I bow to your
professionalism. That said, how
about telling me what's behind
your urgent request to see me?
I must confess I'm quite curious...

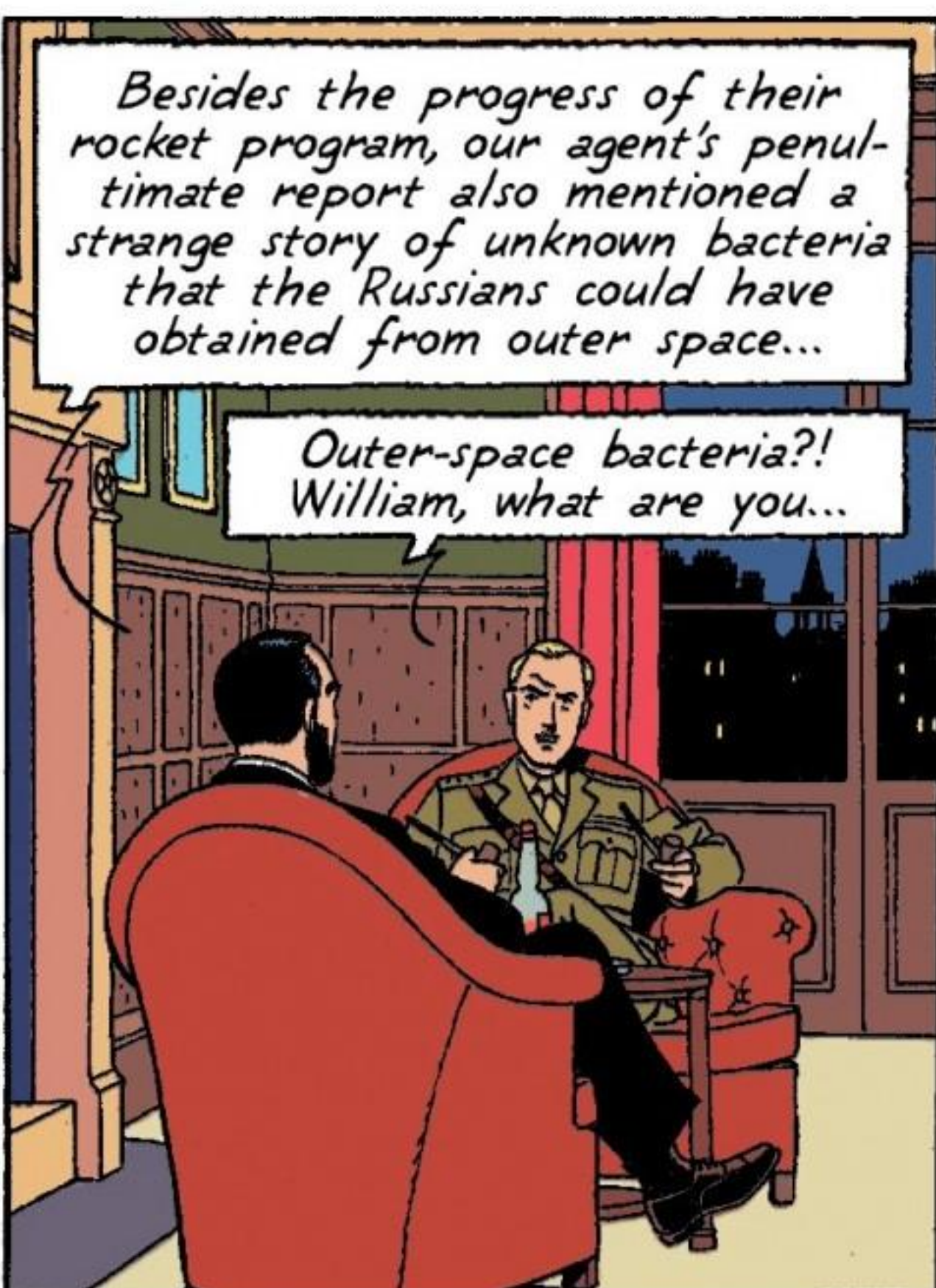


All right! Let's dispense with
the pleasantries. Francis,
I have some serious trouble
with the Soviet Union.

I'm listening, old boy.



About two months ago, my USSR station reported
some very disturbing news from Baikonur, the
top-secret Soviet Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. We
have an agent over there, working in the hospital
attached to the base. I don't need to tell you that
such information is vital to the war that East
and West are waging over the space race...



Besides the progress of their
rocket program, our agent's penul-
timate report also mentioned a
strange story of unknown bacteria
that the Russians could have
obtained from outer space...

Outer-space bacteria?!
William, what are you...



KNOCK
KNOCK

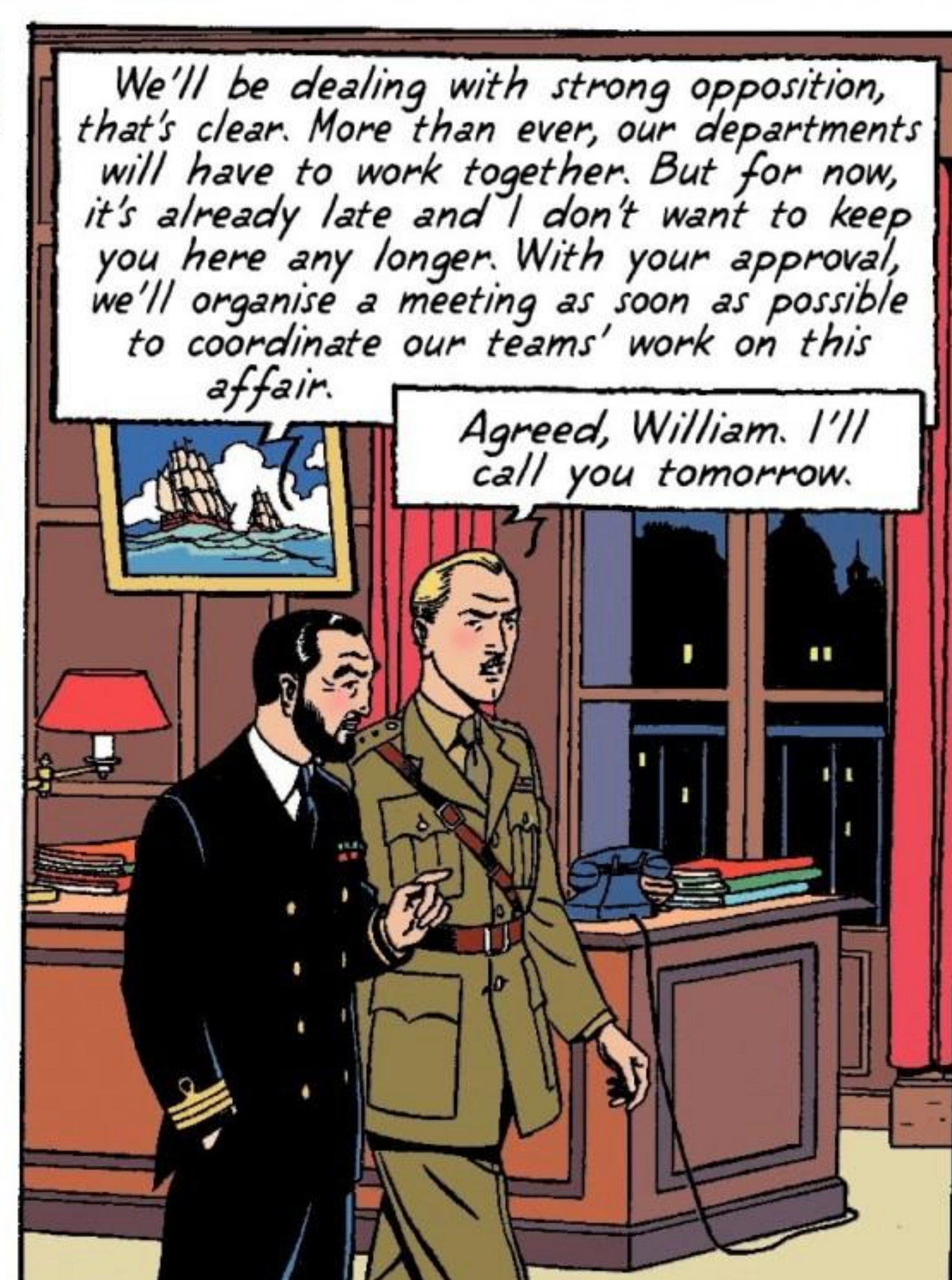
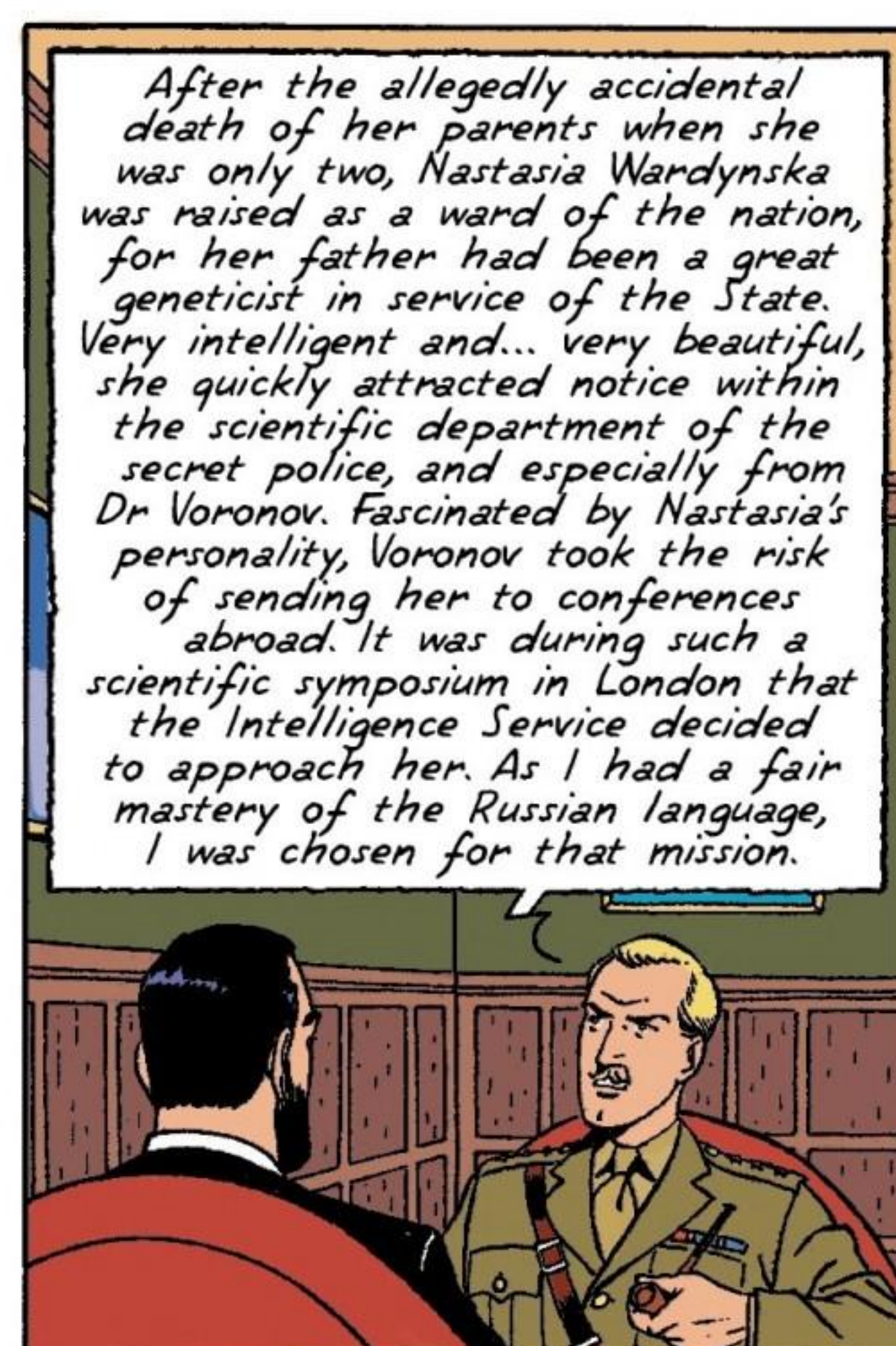
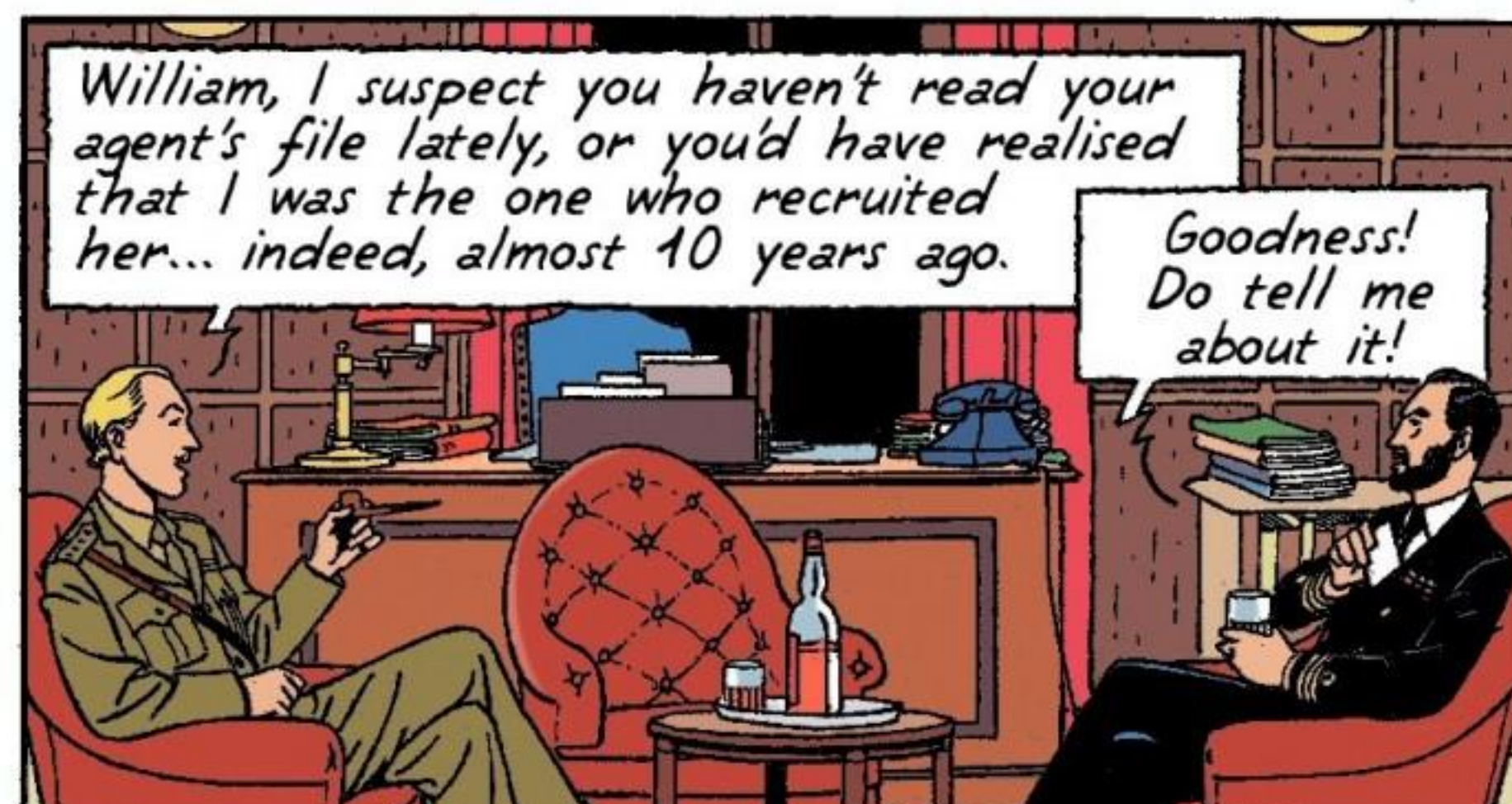
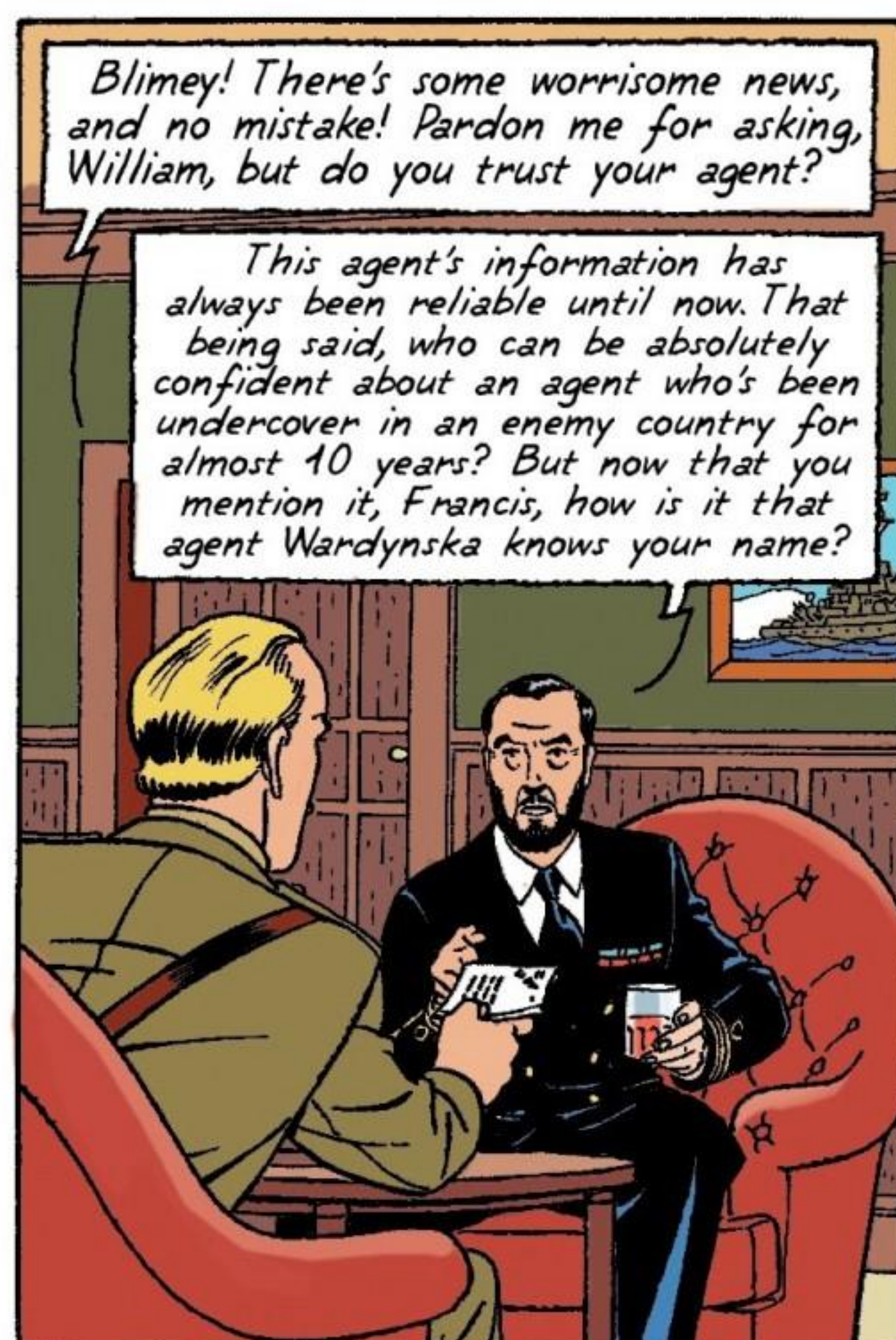
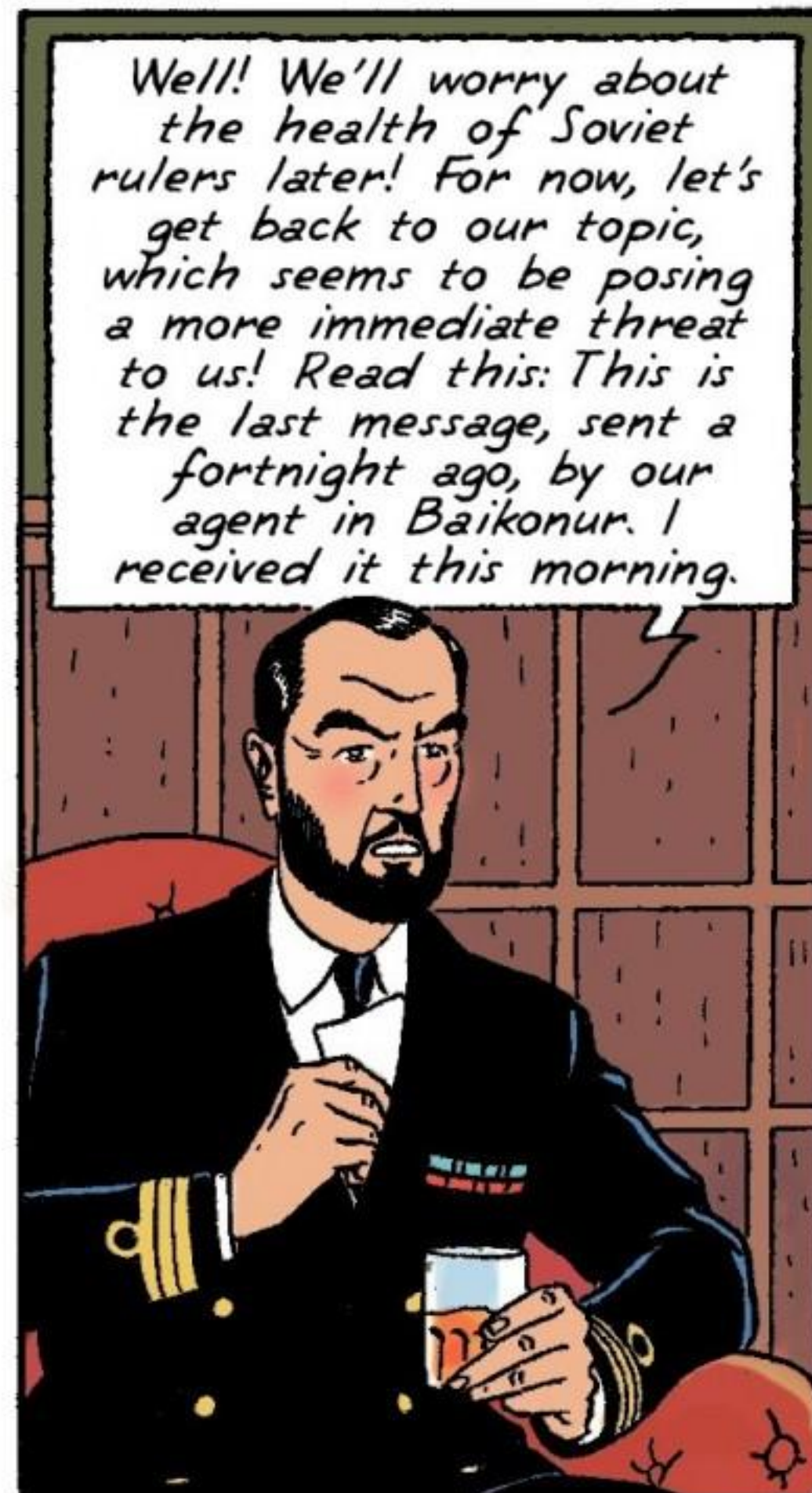
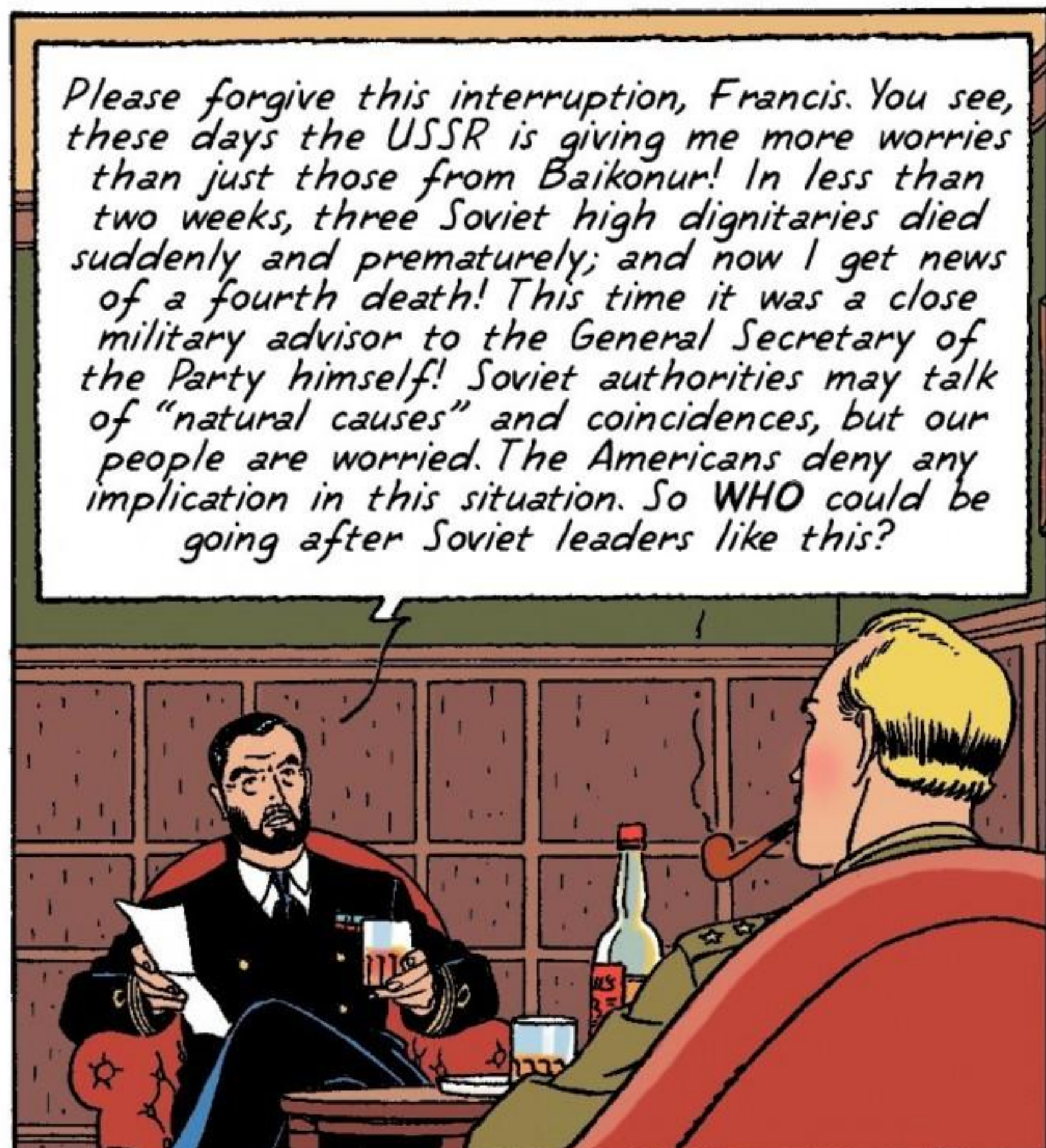
Come in!

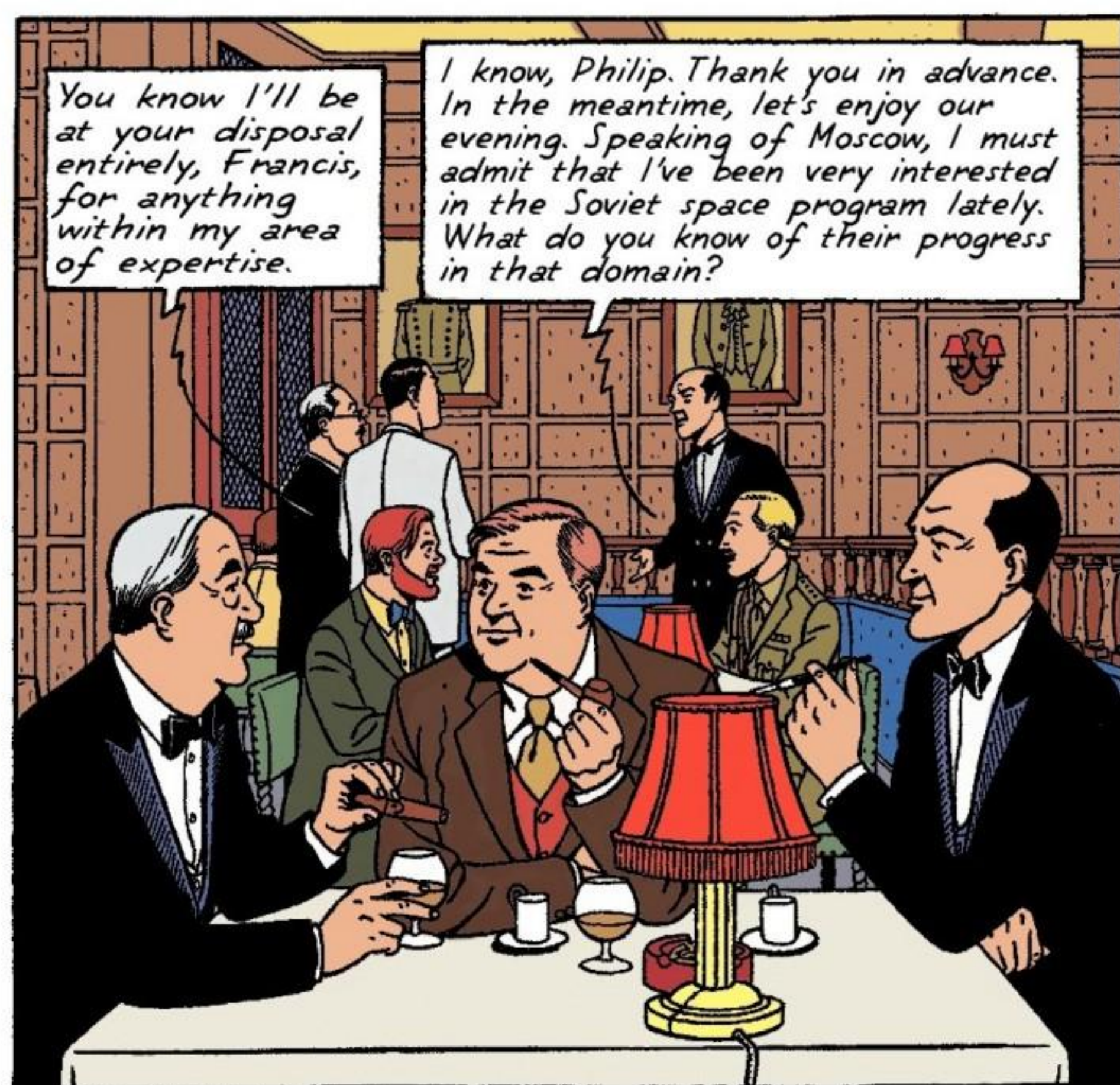
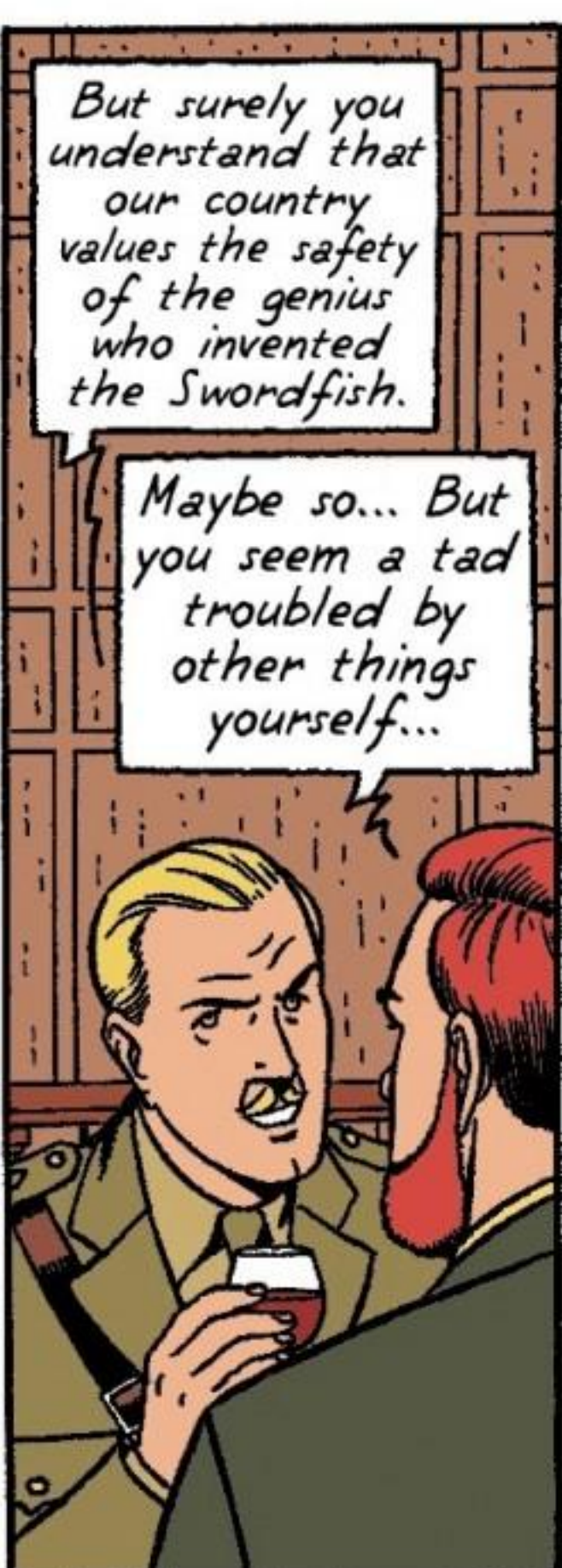
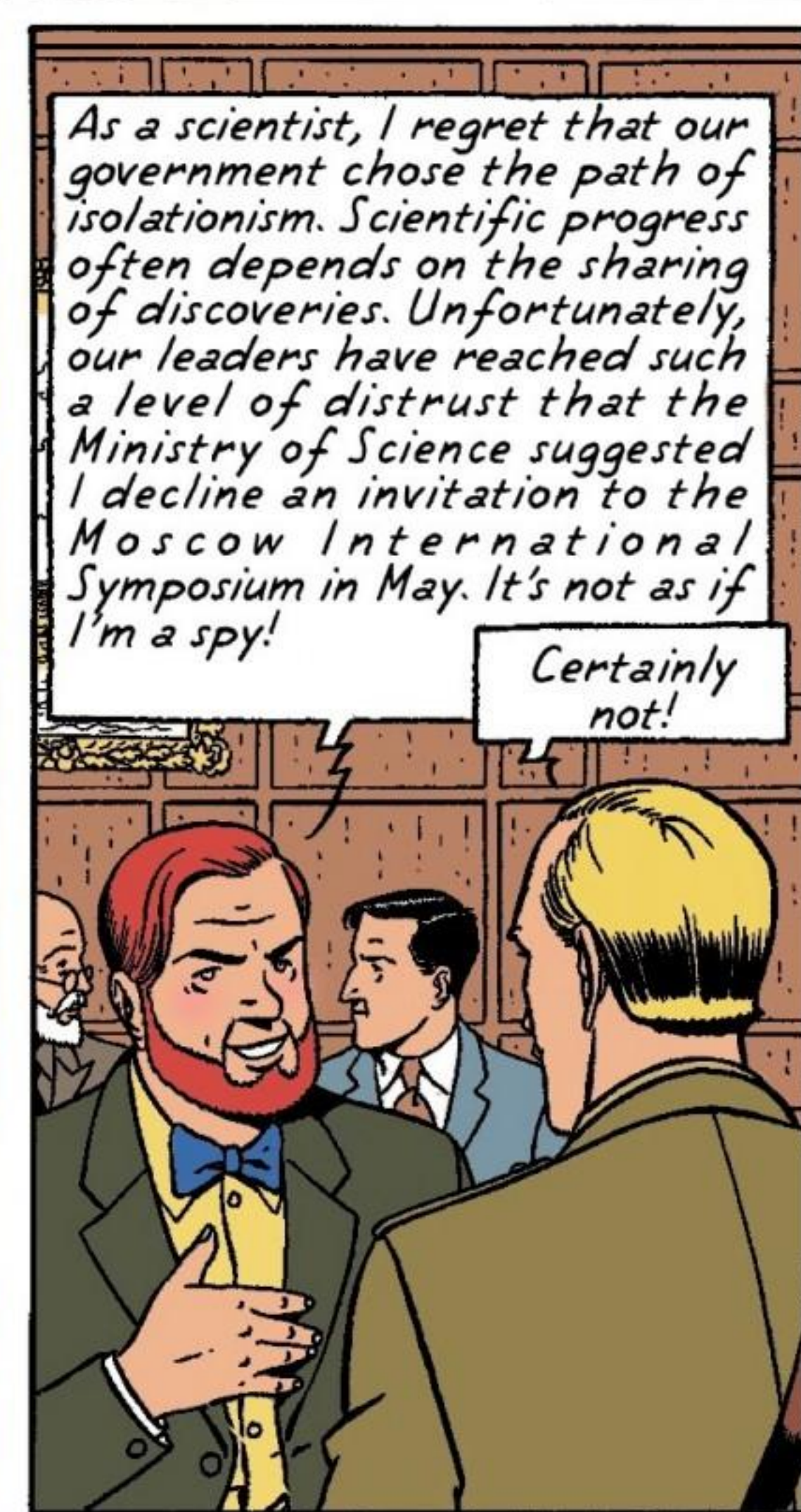
Pardon me, sir, but I have a message
from MOS ONE, and you asked me
to use the emergency protocol if...

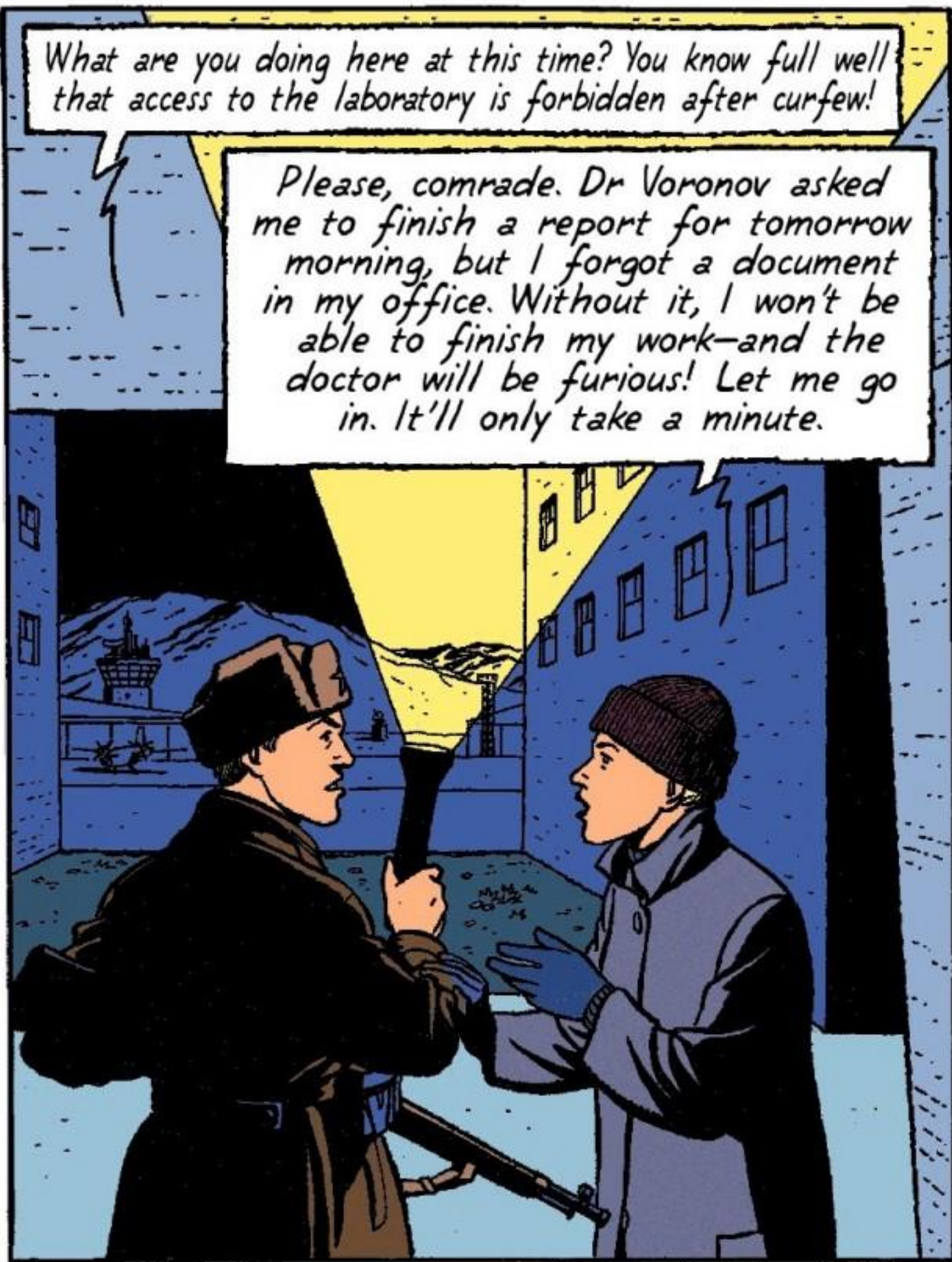
Yes, I know! Bring it here.

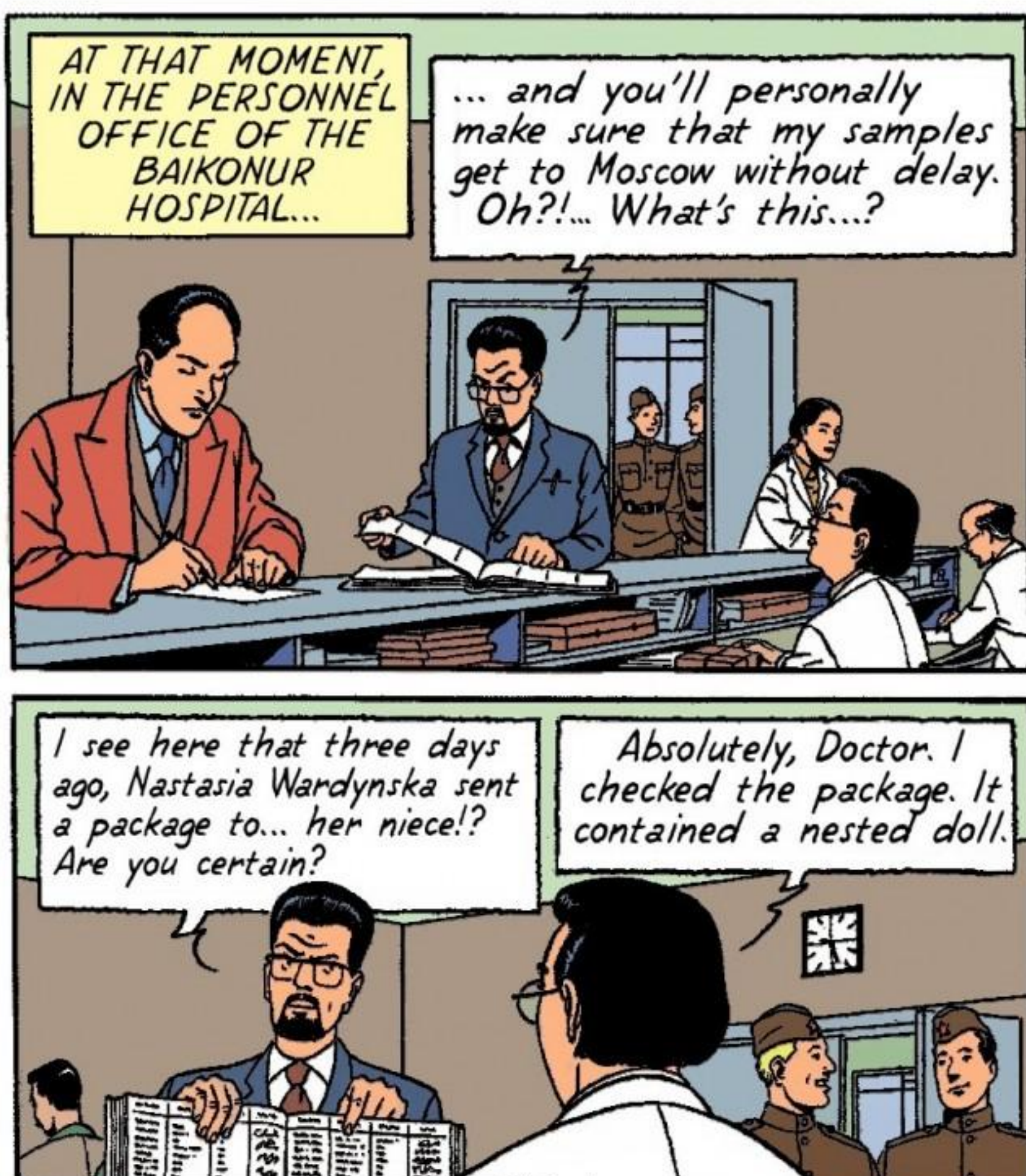
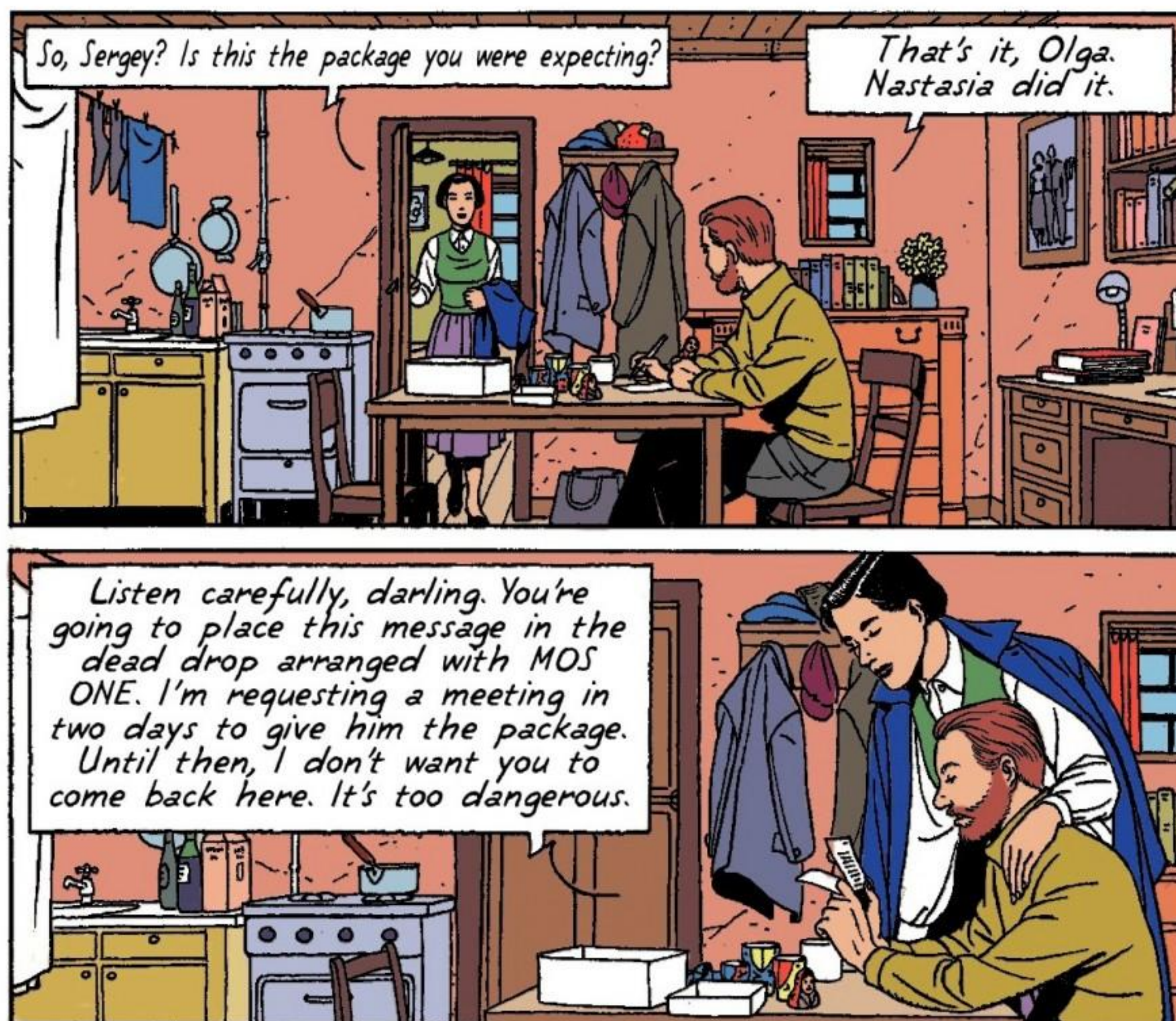


The blazes!
Another one!!









TWO HOURS LATER, A COUPLE OF SOLDIERS BRING NASTASIA WARDYNSKA INTO DR VORONOV'S OFFICE.



Leave us, soldiers. And you, Nastasia—take a seat.



Dr Voronov, I...

SILENCE!

ONCE AGAIN, THE PEEPHOLE HIDDEN BEHIND STALIN'S PORTRAIT OPENS, AND AN INQUISITIVE EYE OBSERVES THE SCENE CAREFULLY.



Let's sum up. I find out that you sent a doll to your niece—when we both know you have no relatives. Then I learn that you went against orders and entered Laboratory A after curfew in order to retrieve a document needed for an urgent report... I hadn't requested. Finally, I discover that a sample of bacteria Z has disappeared...



So I had your room searched, and what was found inside?... The smallest doll of the matryoshka⁽¹⁾ you bought! Keeping it wasn't very smart, my little Nastasia. It's the proof that I was missing.

But Doctor, the... the proof of what? I assure you that...



Don't take me for a fool, comrade Wardynska! The woman at the post office confirmed that she checked your package and the last doll didn't open. In fact, it was the last but one doll; but you had sealed it after putting a sample of bacteria Z inside!

Admit it!!

AAAAH!

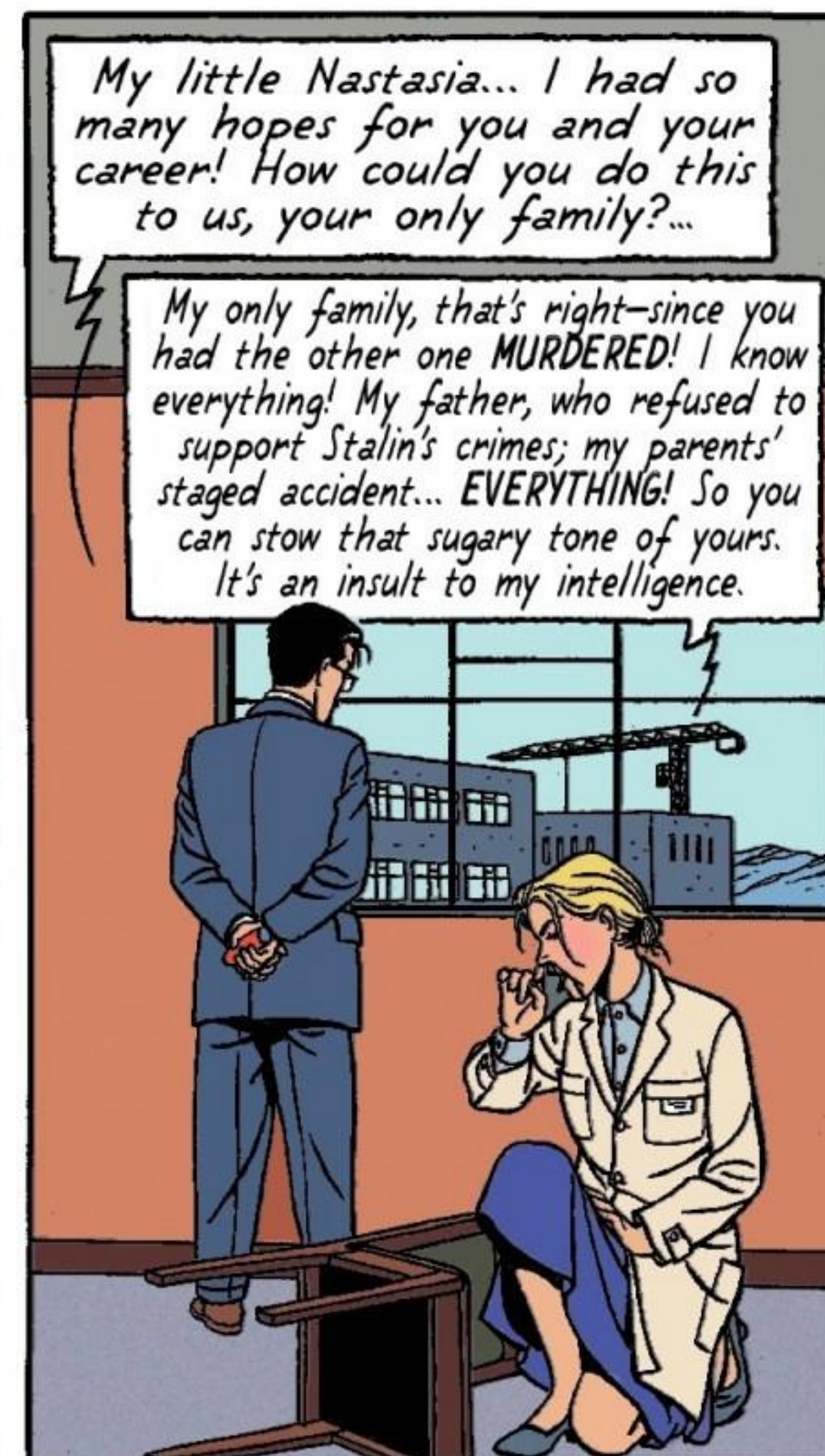


Yes, I admit it! I stole a sample of the bacteria with which you are infecting children of gulag prisoners! All that to turn them into some sort of horrible, living weapons. Let me tell you that I'm proud to have betrayed a monster like you!



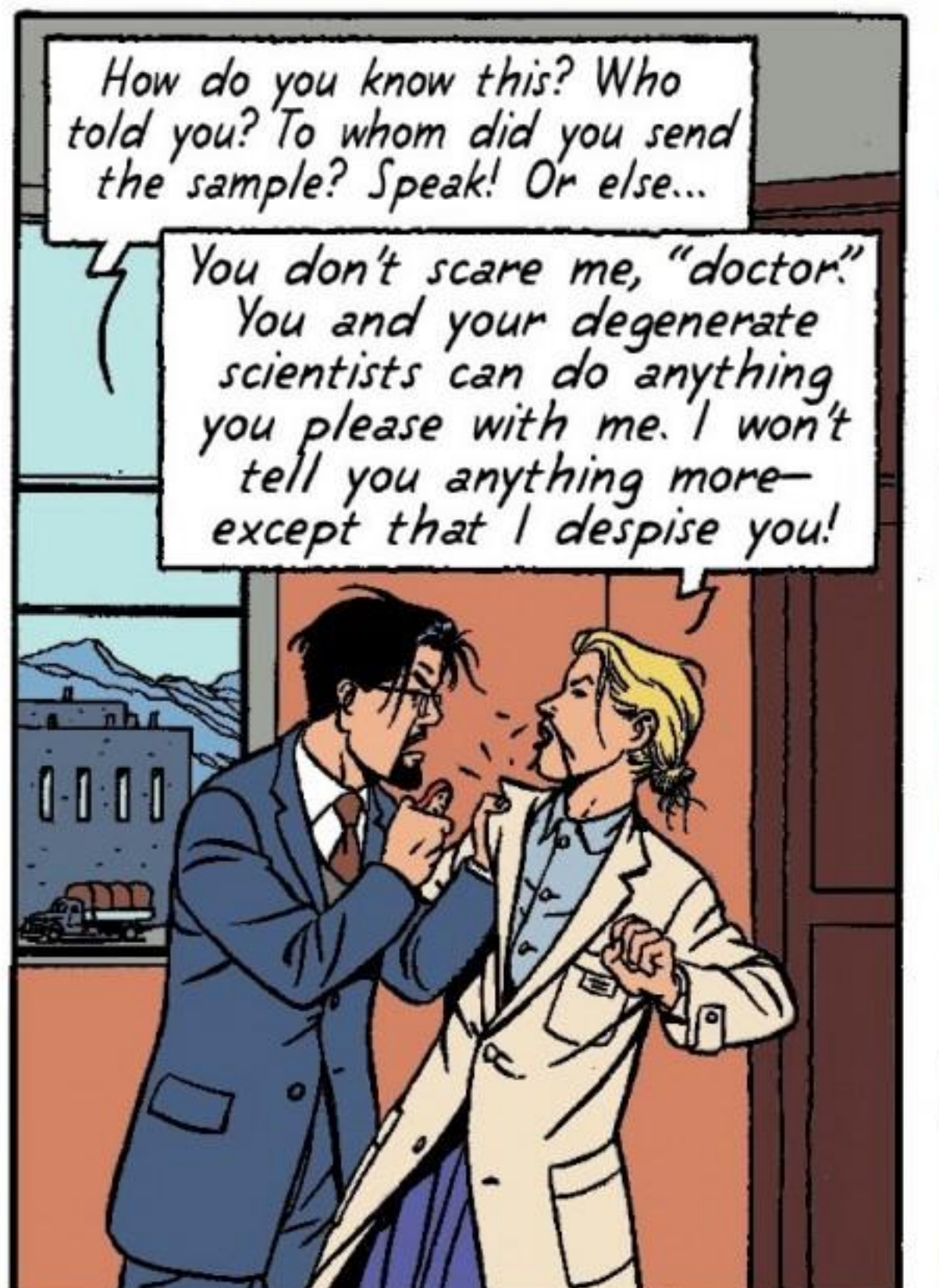
YOU DIRTY LITTLE SPY!

SLAP!



My little Nastasia... I had so many hopes for you and your career! How could you do this to us, your only family?...

My only family, that's right—since you had the other one MURDERED! I know everything! My father, who refused to support Stalin's crimes; my parents' staged accident... EVERYTHING! So you can stow that sugary tone of yours. It's an insult to my intelligence.

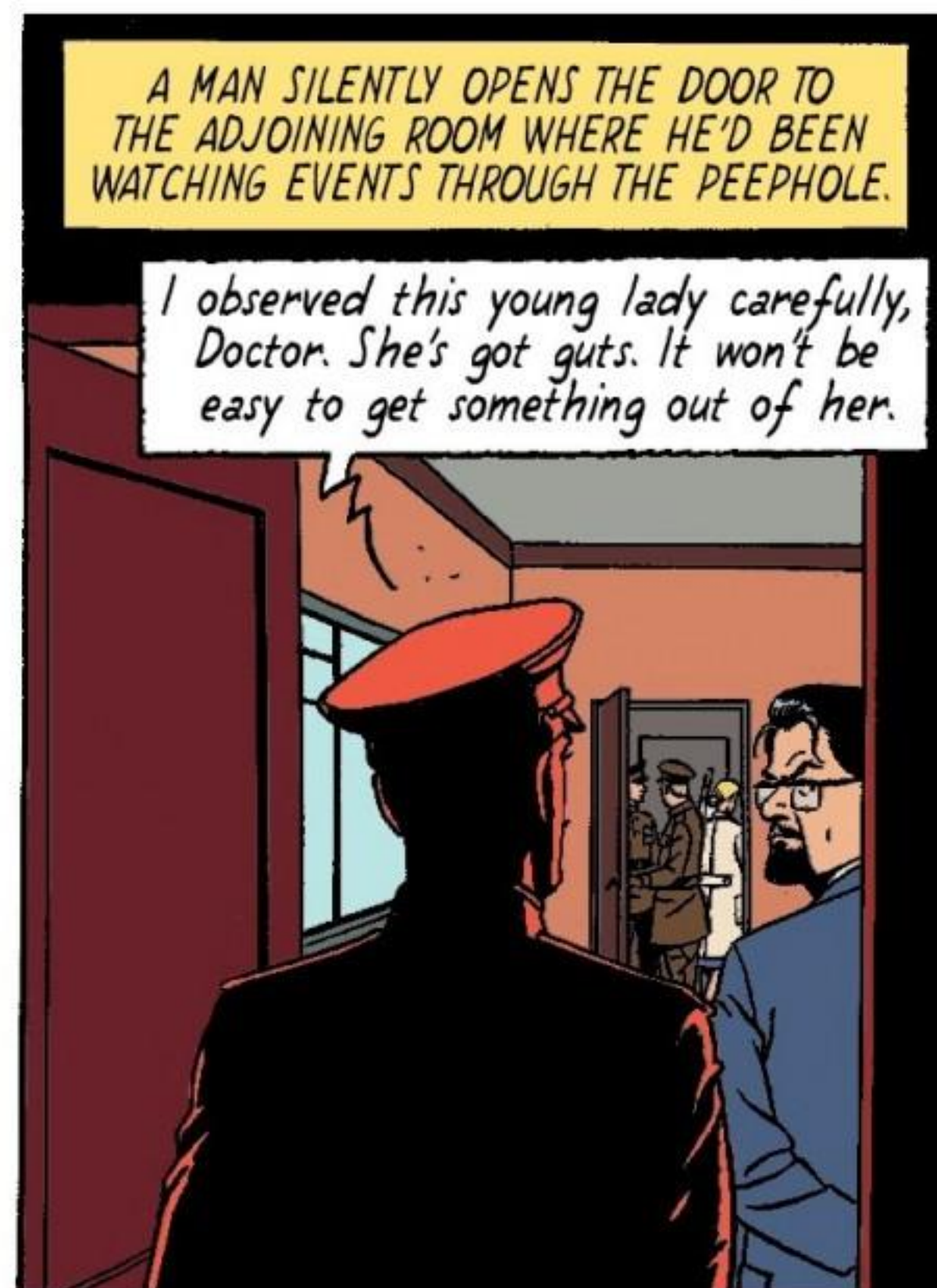


How do you know this? Who told you? To whom did you send the sample? Speak! Or else...

You don't scare me, "doctor." You and your degenerate scientists can do anything you please with me. I won't tell you anything more—except that I despise you!

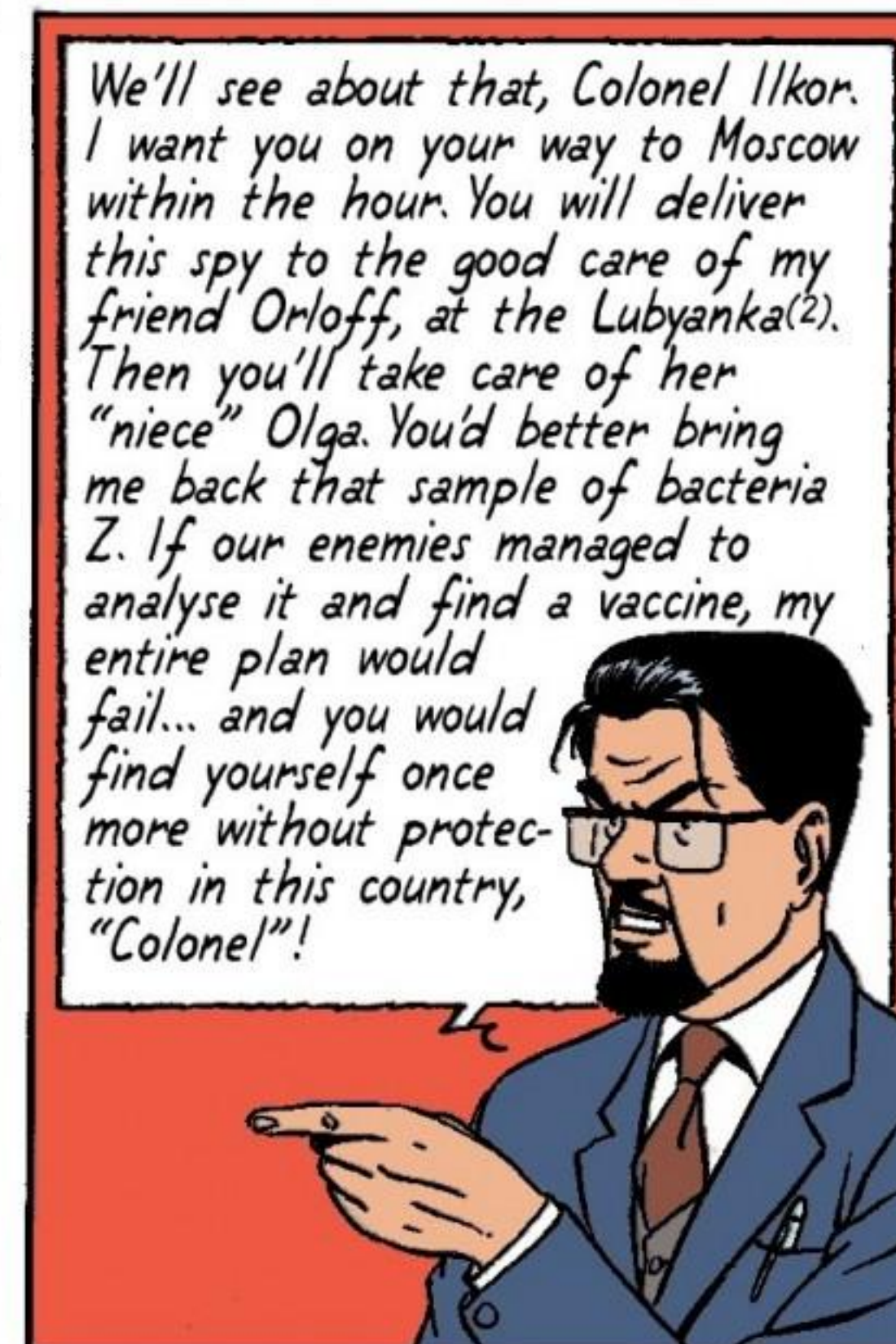


RAAAAH! Guards! Take this trash out of here before I strangle her with my own hands!



A MAN SILENTLY OPENS THE DOOR TO THE ADJOINING ROOM WHERE HE'D BEEN WATCHING EVENTS THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE.

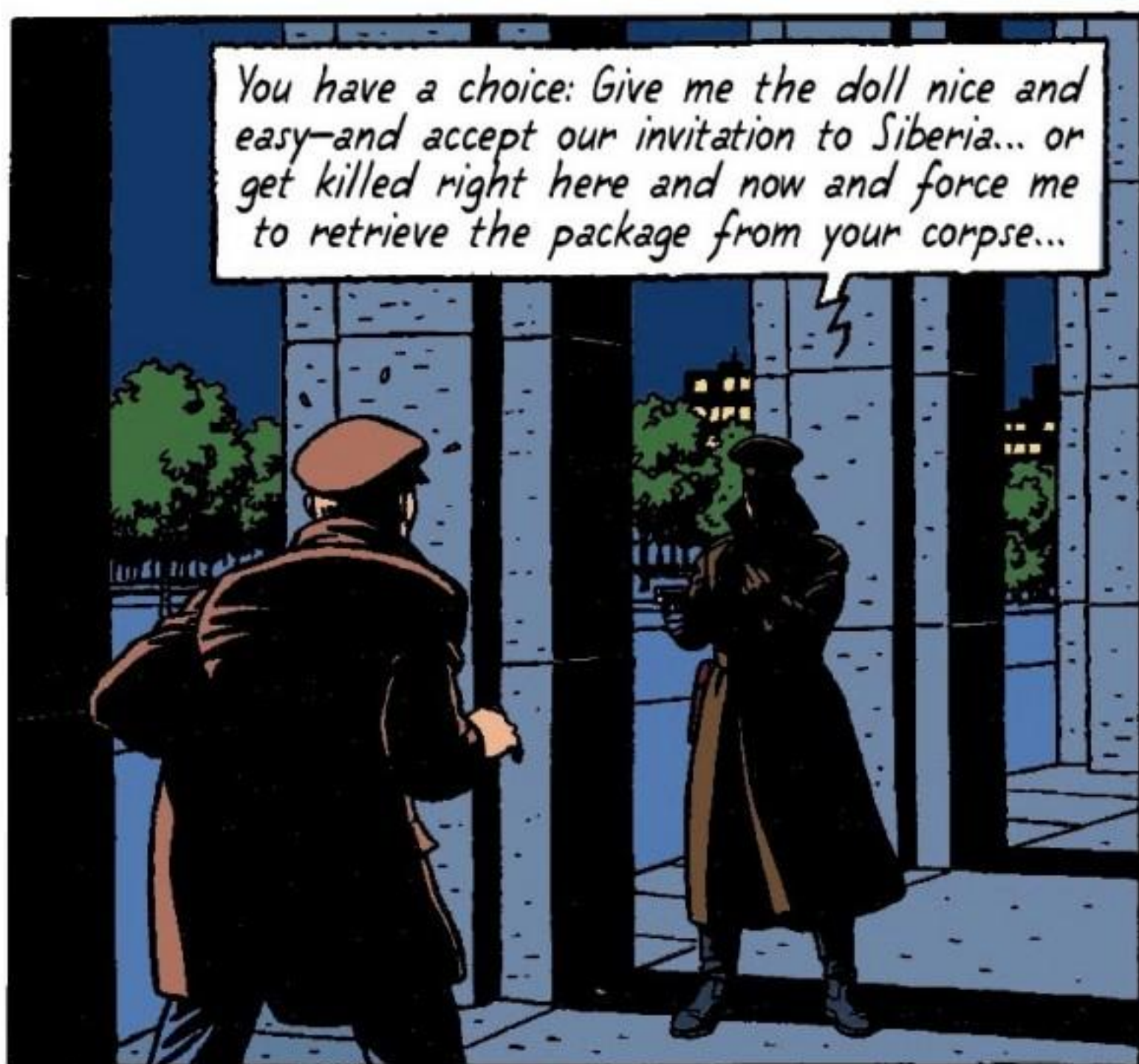
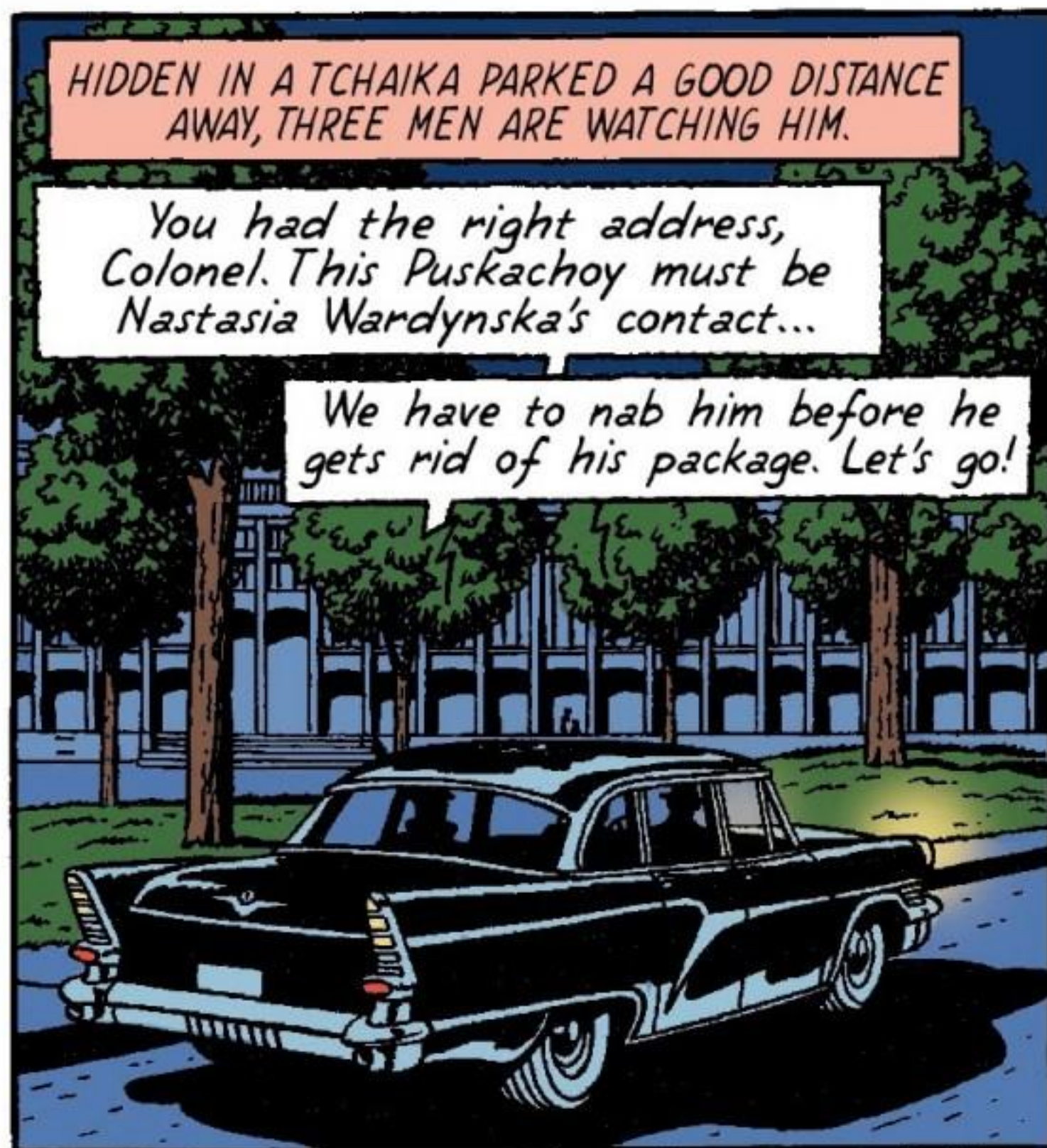
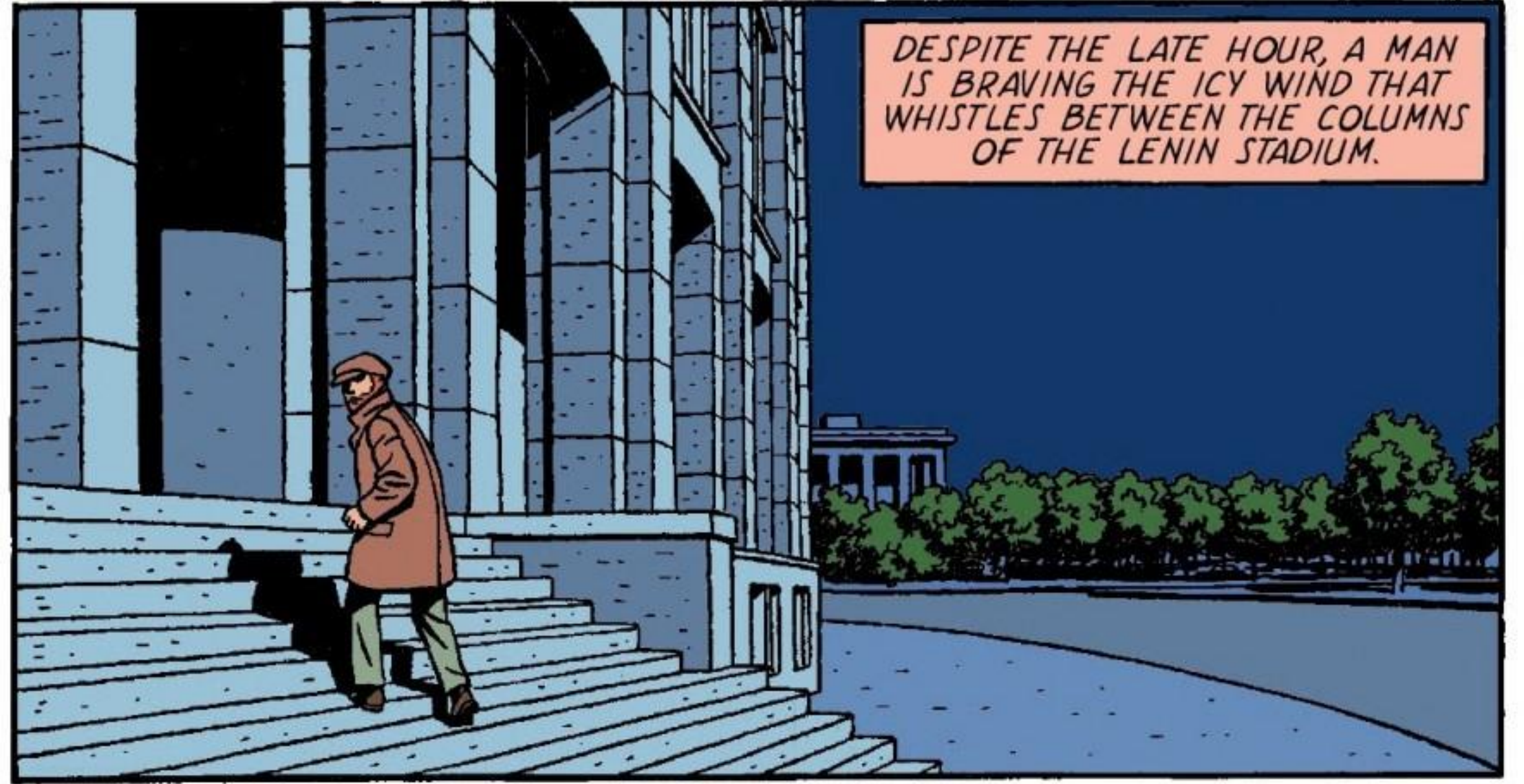
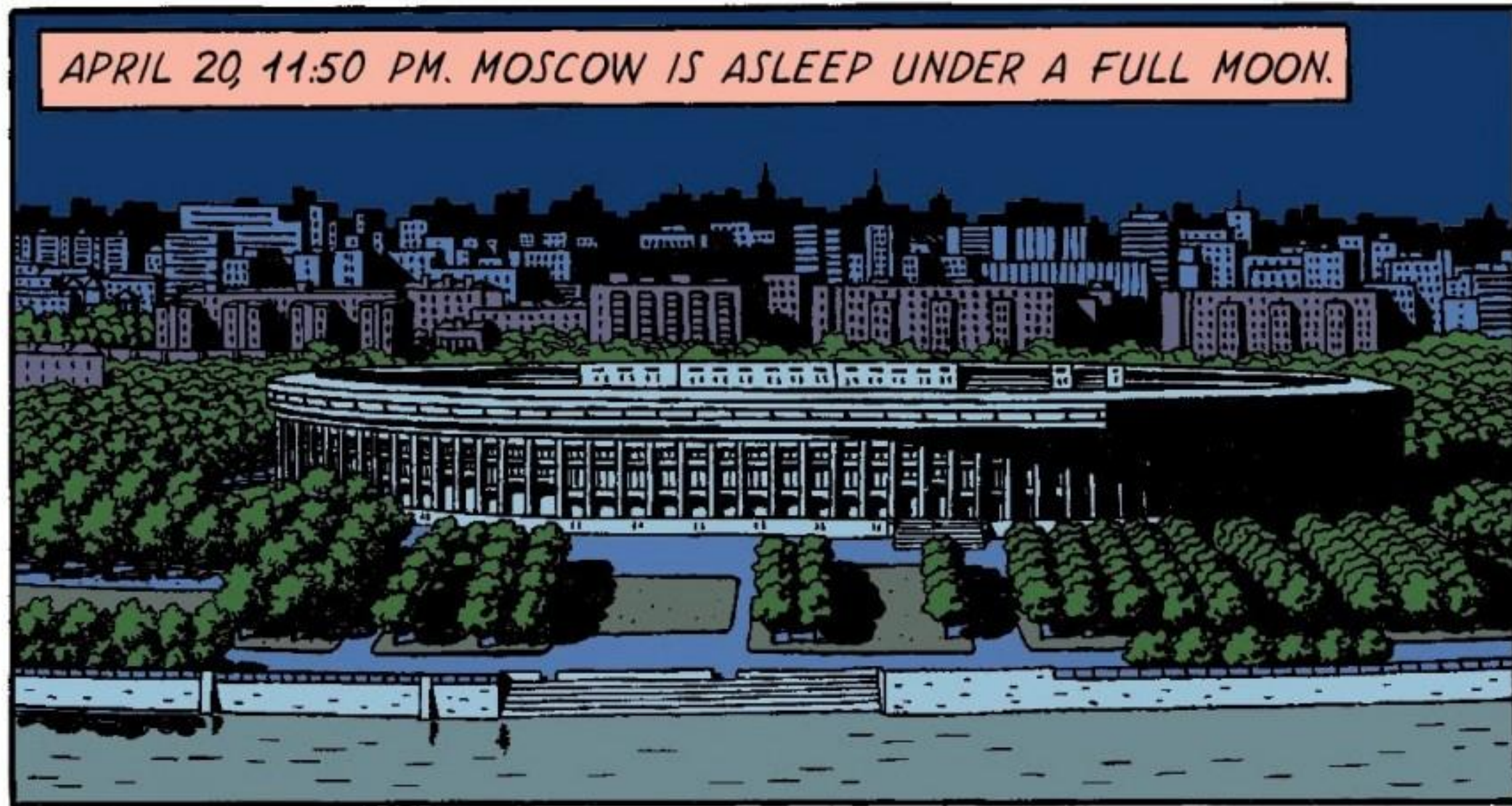
I observed this young lady carefully, Doctor. She's got guts. It won't be easy to get something out of her.

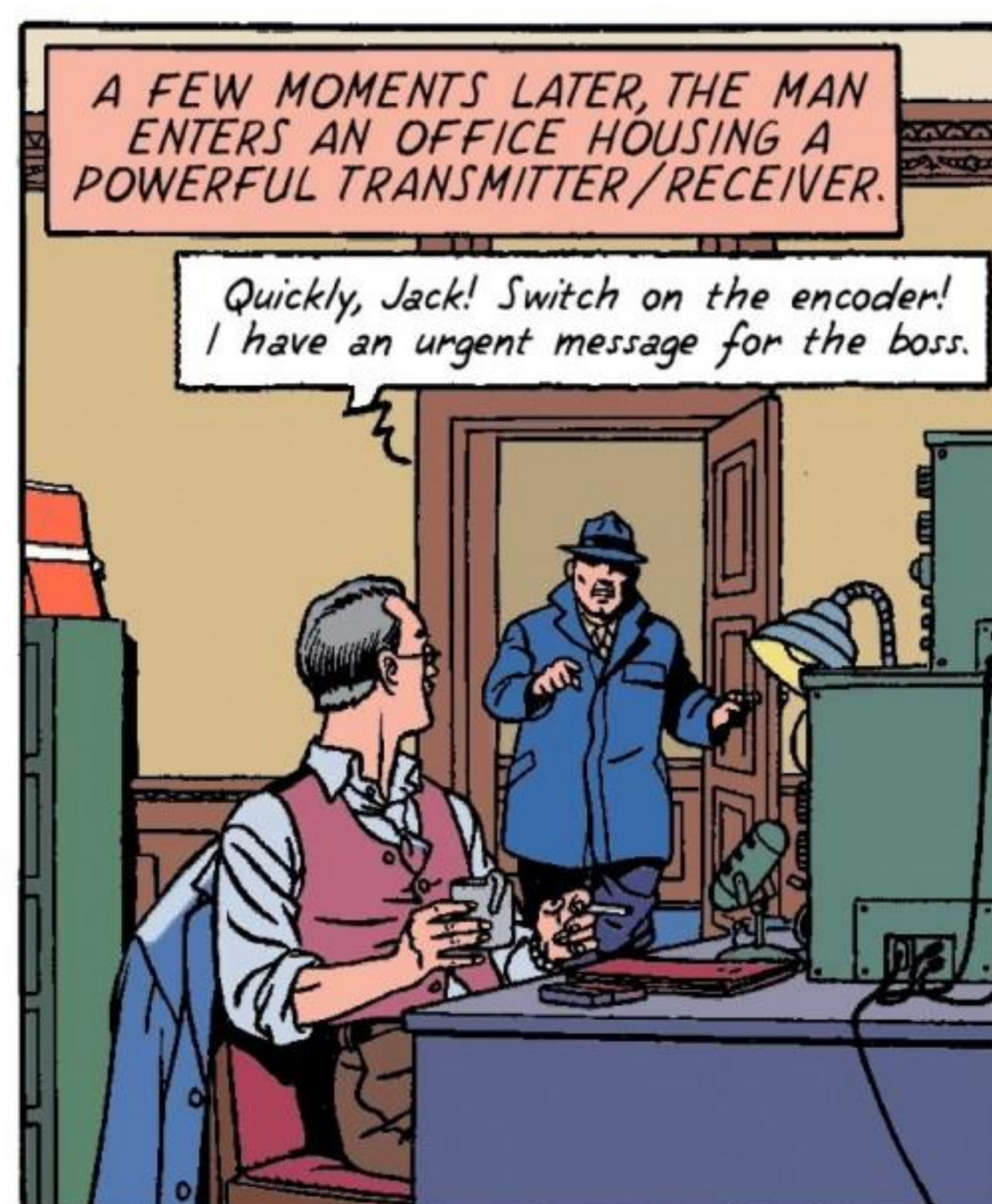
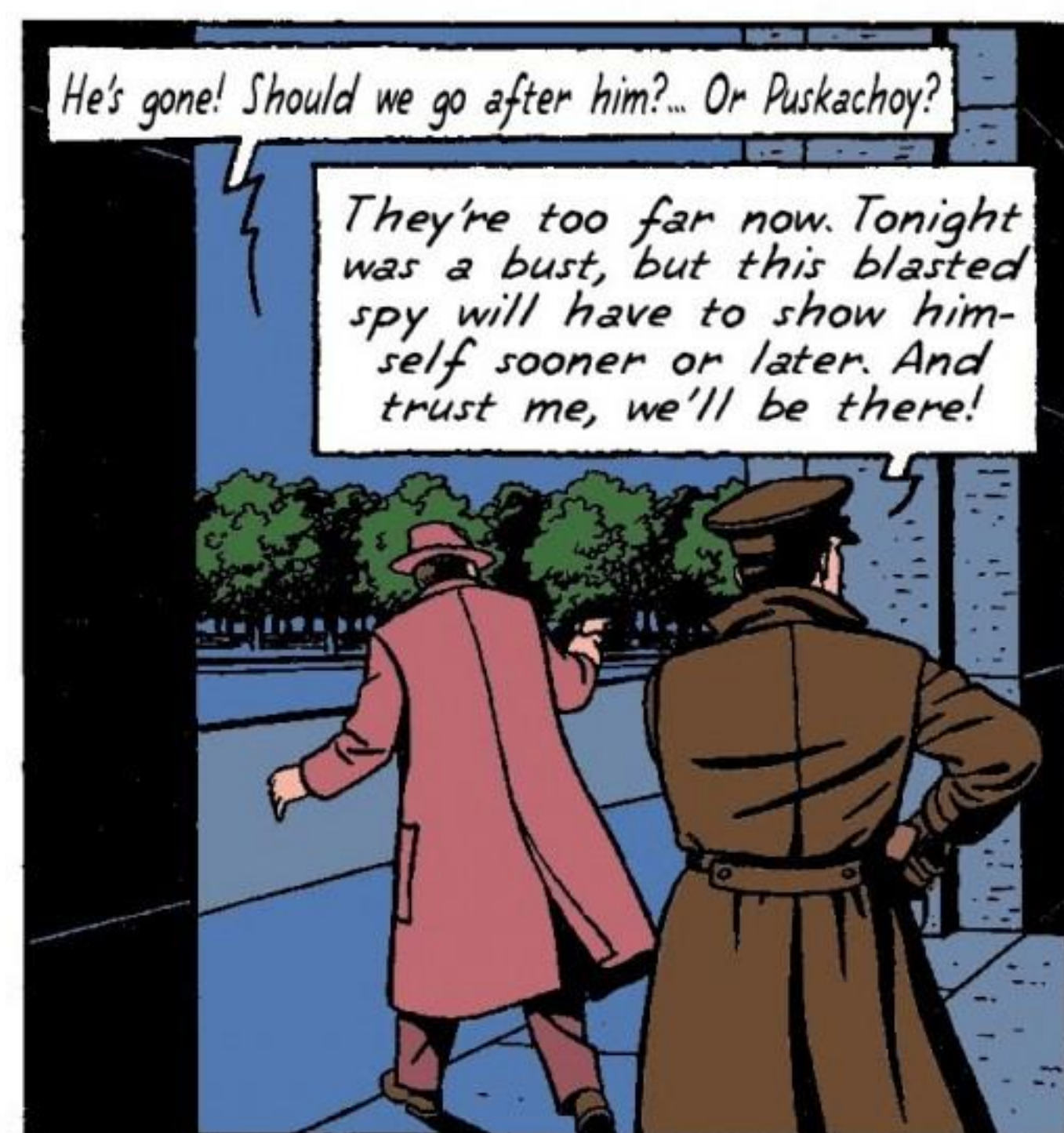


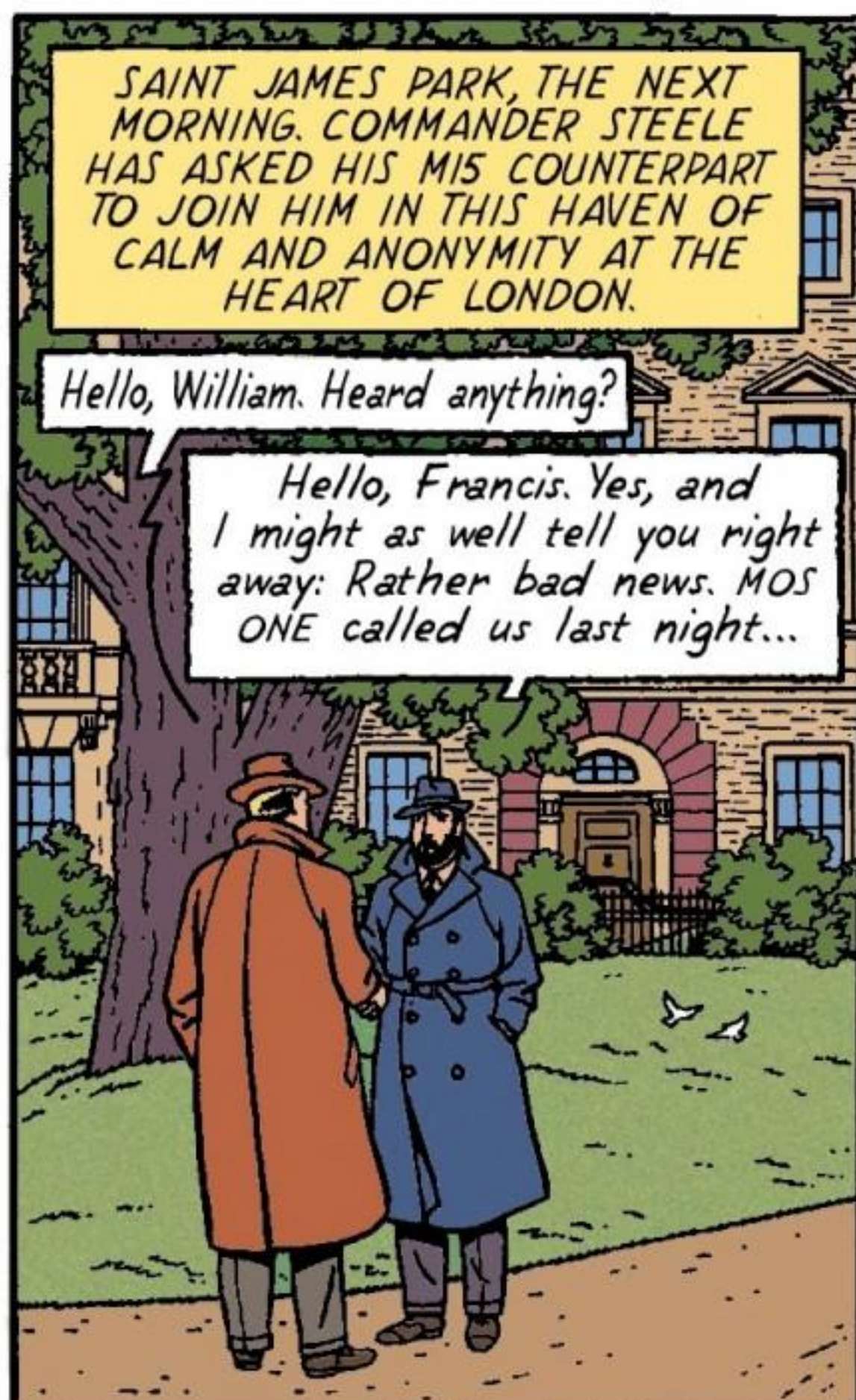
We'll see about that, Colonel Ilkor. I want you on your way to Moscow within the hour. You will deliver this spy to the good care of my friend Orloff, at the Lubyanka⁽²⁾. Then you'll take care of her "niece" Olga. You'd better bring me back that sample of bacteria Z. If our enemies managed to analyse it and find a vaccine, my entire plan would fail... and you would find yourself once more without protection in this country, "Colonel!"

⁽¹⁾NESTED DOLL

⁽²⁾KGB HEADQUARTERS.



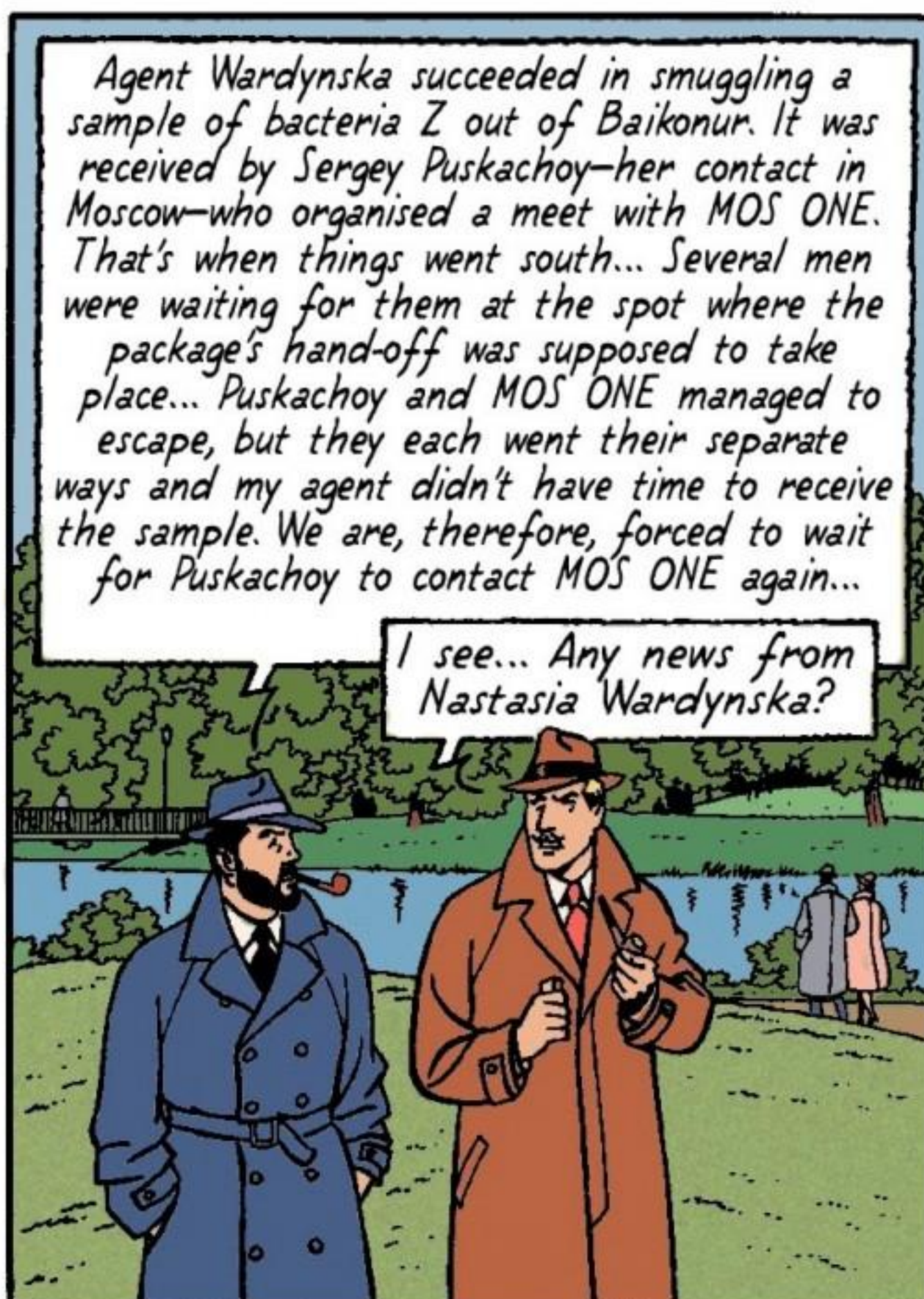




SAINT JAMES PARK, THE NEXT MORNING. COMMANDER STEELE HAS ASKED HIS M16 COUNTERPART TO JOIN HIM IN THIS HAVEN OF CALM AND ANONYMITY AT THE HEART OF LONDON.

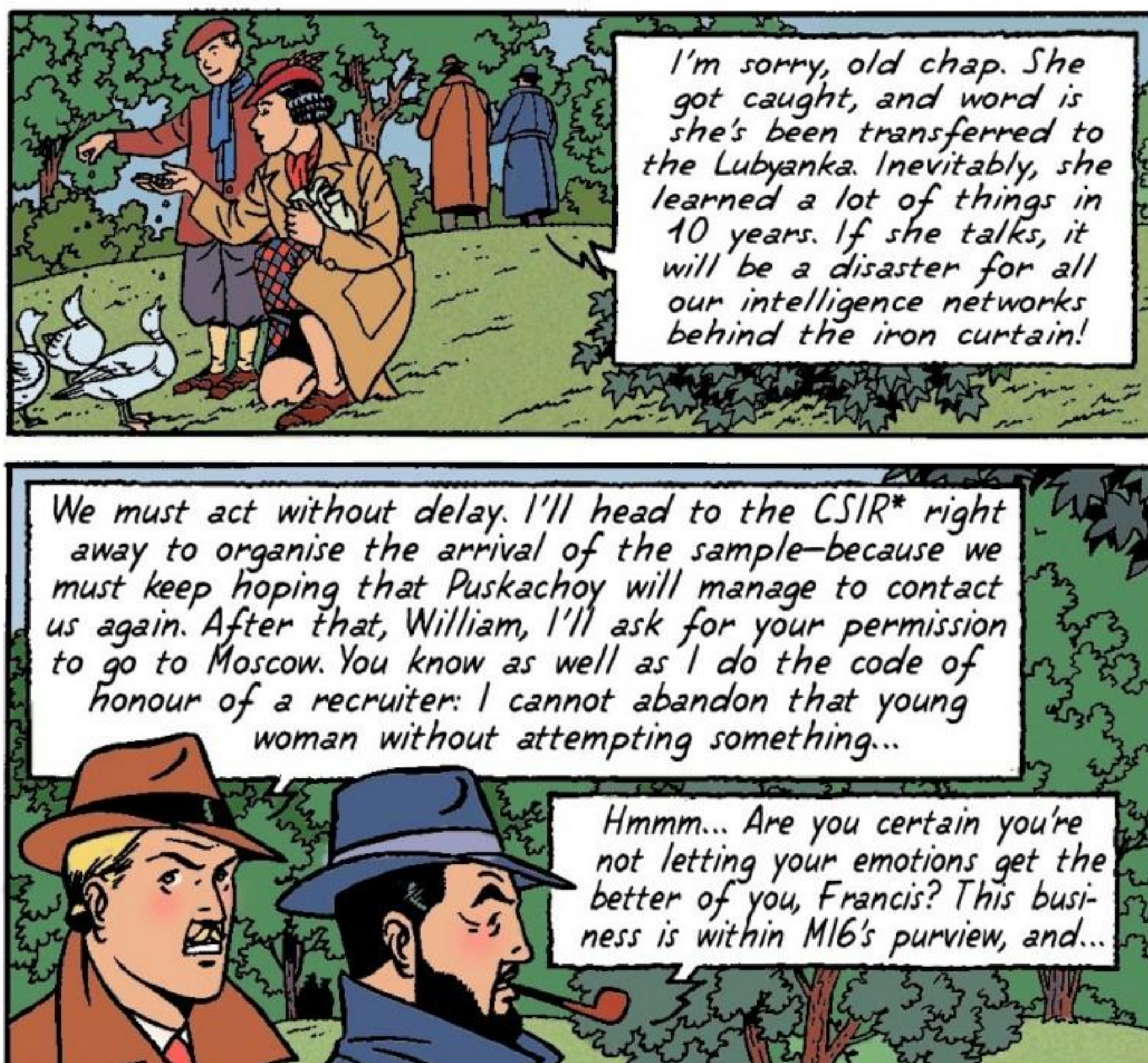
Hello, William. Heard anything?

Hello, Francis. Yes, and I might as well tell you right away: Rather bad news. MOS ONE called us last night...



Agent Wardynska succeeded in smuggling a sample of bacteria Z out of Baikonur. It was received by Sergey Puskachoy—her contact in Moscow—who organised a meet with MOS ONE. That's when things went south... Several men were waiting for them at the spot where the package's hand-off was supposed to take place... Puskachoy and MOS ONE managed to escape, but they each went their separate ways and my agent didn't have time to receive the sample. We are, therefore, forced to wait for Puskachoy to contact MOS ONE again...

I see... Any news from Nastasia Wardynska?



I'm sorry, old chap. She got caught, and word is she's been transferred to the Lubyanka. Inevitably, she learned a lot of things in 10 years. If she talks, it will be a disaster for all our intelligence networks behind the iron curtain!

We must act without delay. I'll head to the CSIR* right away to organise the arrival of the sample—because we must keep hoping that Puskachoy will manage to contact us again. After that, William, I'll ask for your permission to go to Moscow. You know as well as I do the code of honour of a recruiter: I cannot abandon that young woman without attempting something...

Hmmm... Are you certain you're not letting your emotions get the better of you, Francis? This business is within M16's purview, and...



William! I promise I will place myself under the command of your station chief. I won't do a thing without M16 approval. Besides, I'm the only one who's ever met Nastasia Wardynska. I could prove useful to your men. Trust me!

Hmm... I must admit you make a good case. All right... If you'll place yourself at the disposal of MOS ONE, I'll agree.



AN HOUR LATER, AT THE CSIR, IN THE SUBURBS OF LONDON...

Tell me, Philip, do you remember the conversation we had at the club less than a month ago? About the Soviet space program?

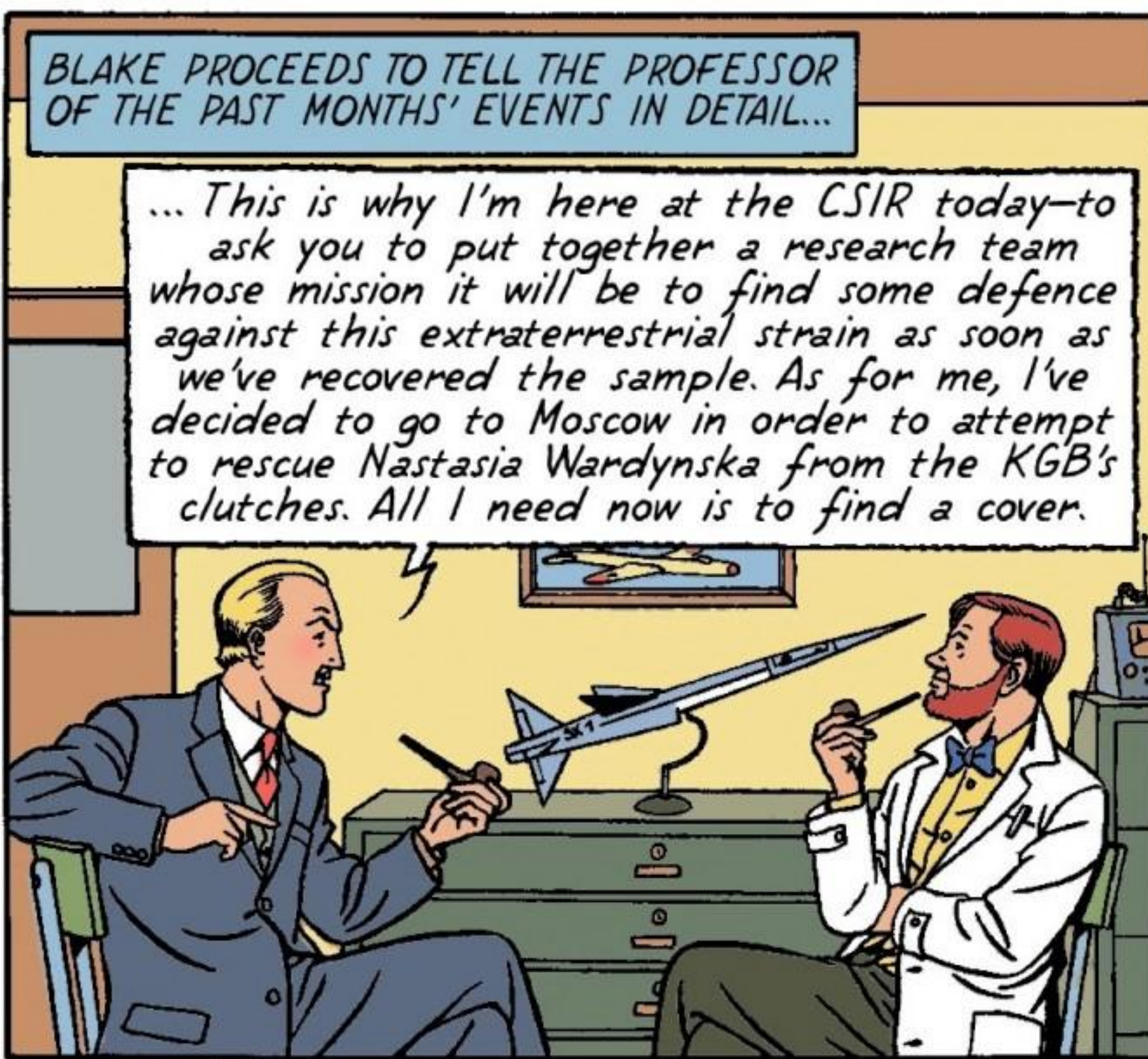


Of course, old chap! You had such an air of mystery about you!

Well, it's time I explained to you the whole business that was behind all my questions!



It all began in Baikonur, this past January...



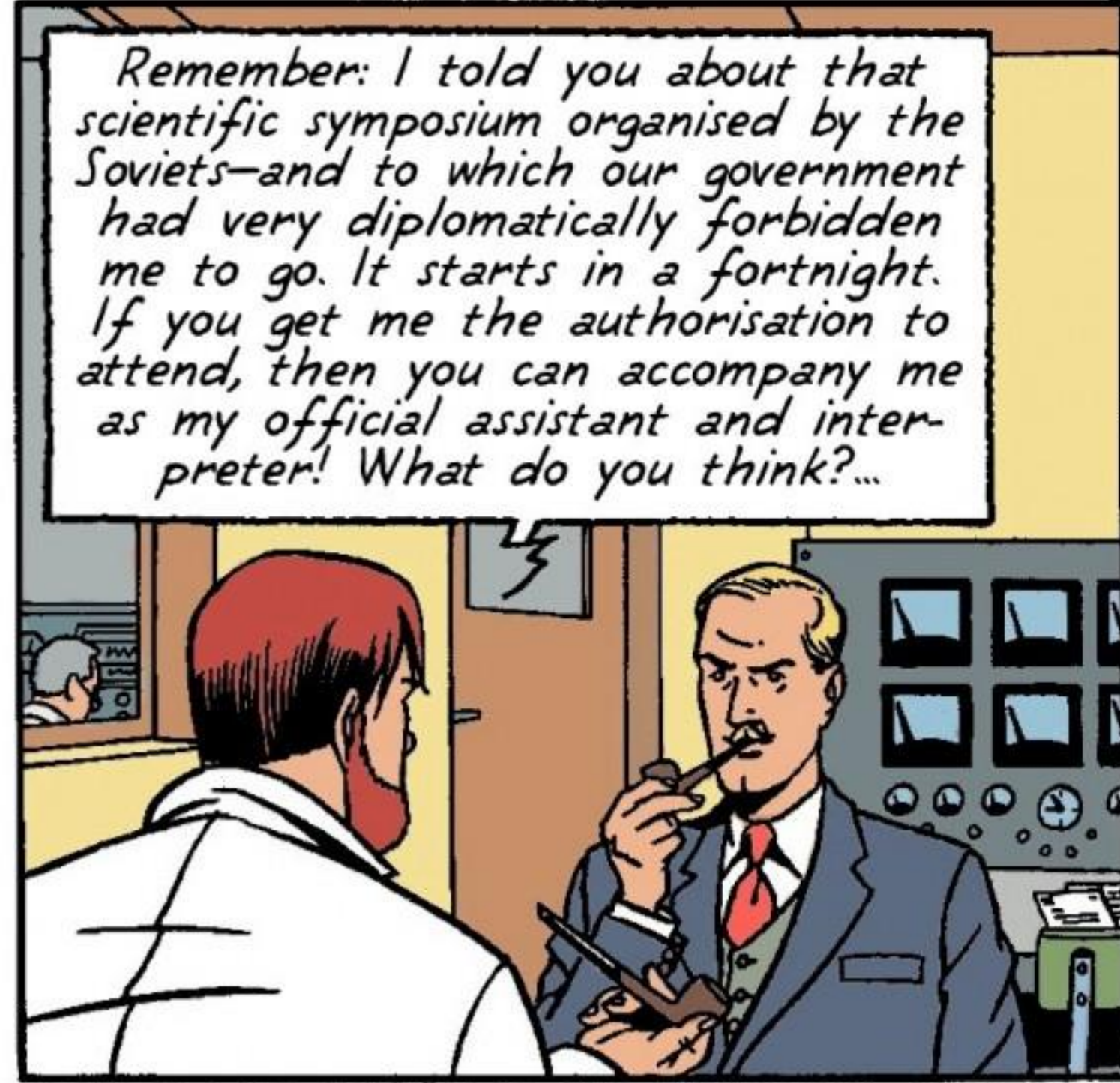
BLAKE PROCEEDS TO TELL THE PROFESSOR OF THE PAST MONTHS' EVENTS IN DETAIL...

... This is why I'm here at the CSIR today—to ask you to put together a research team whose mission it will be to find some defence against this extraterrestrial strain as soon as we've recovered the sample. As for me, I've decided to go to Moscow in order to attempt to rescue Nastasia Wardynska from the KGB's clutches. All I need now is to find a cover.

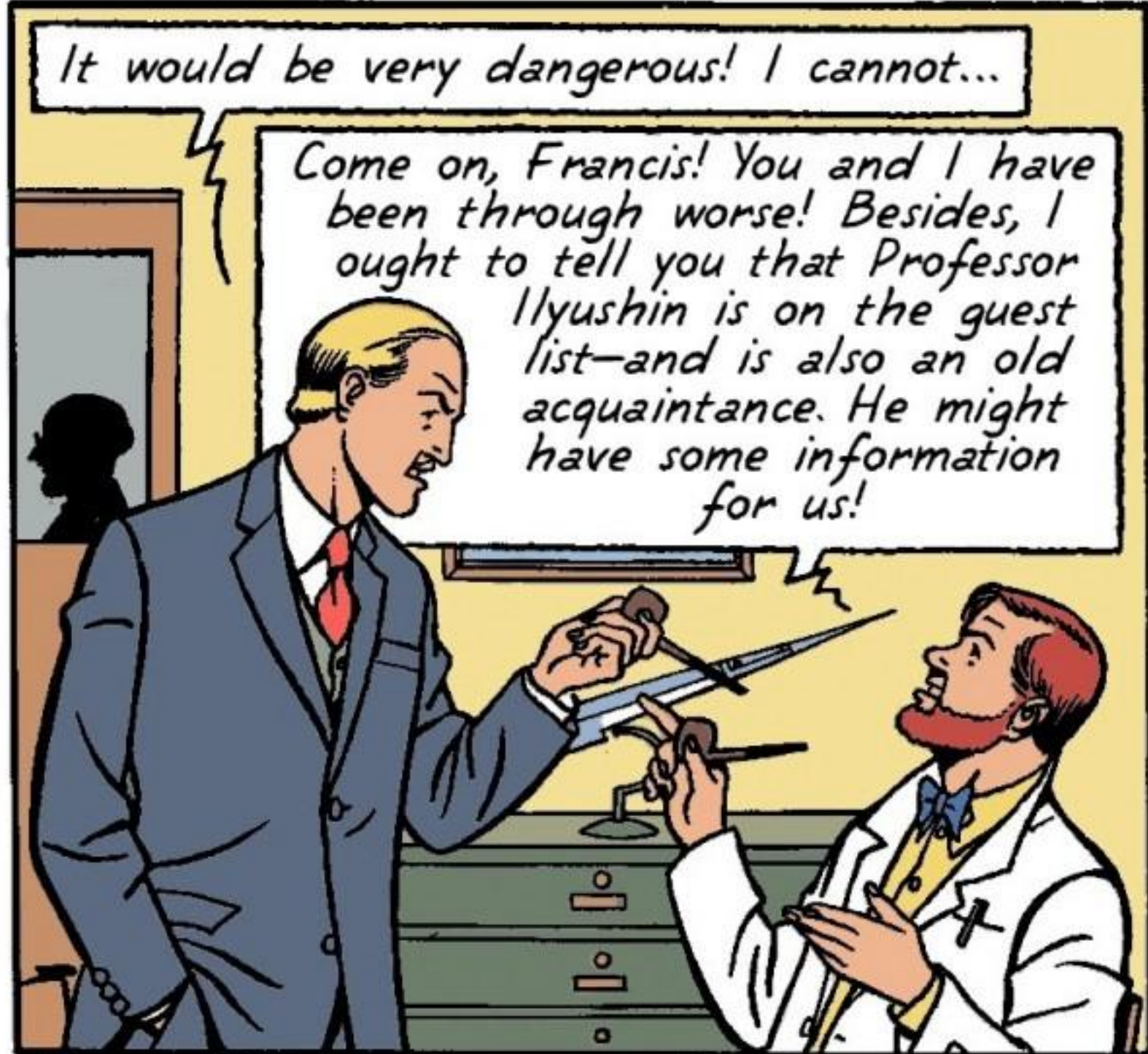


A cover?... But!?... Yes! Of course! Look no further, Francis: I will be your cover!

You!?... What do you mean?

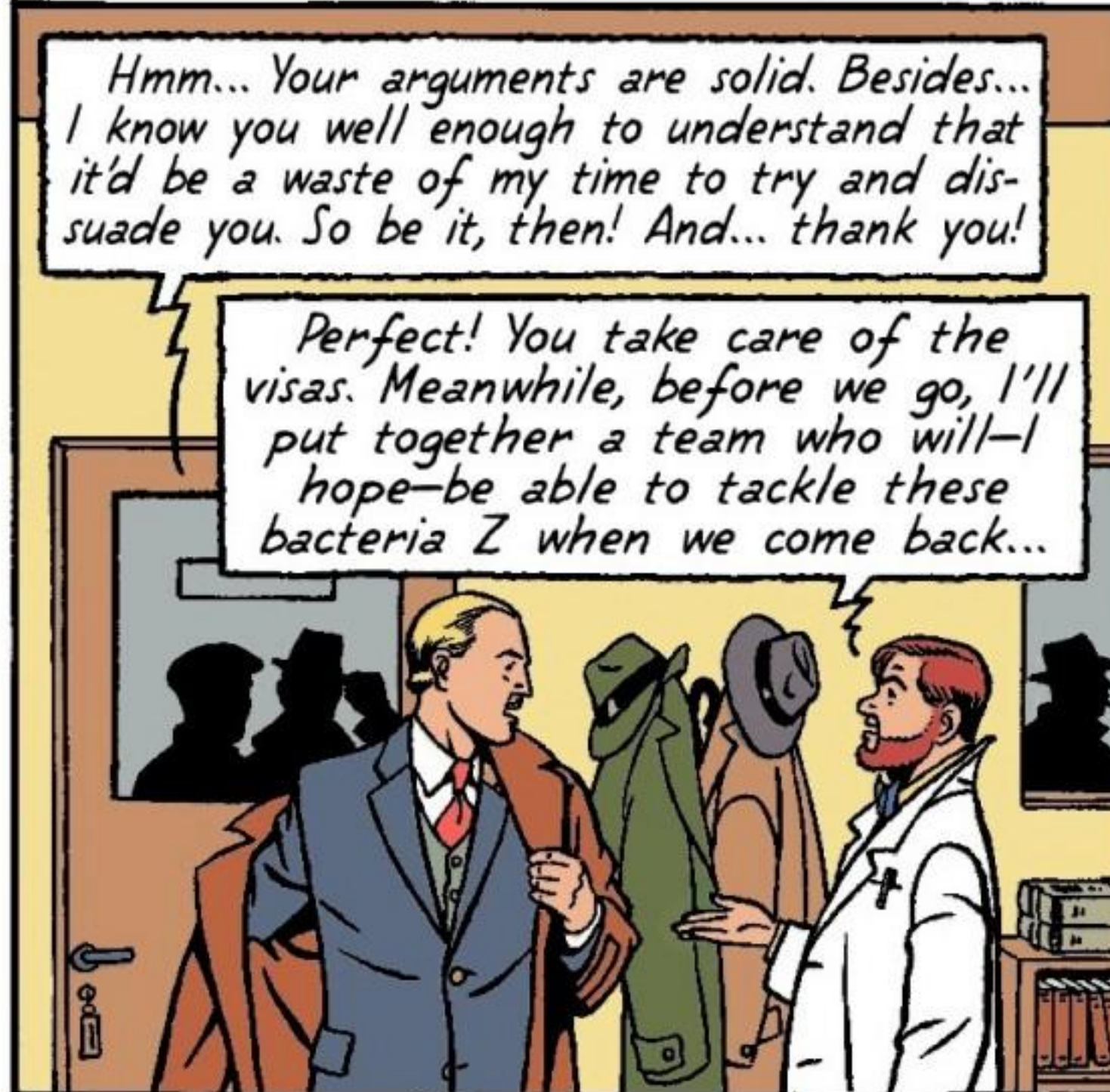


Remember: I told you about that scientific symposium organised by the Soviets—and to which our government had very diplomatically forbidden me to go. It starts in a fortnight. If you get me the authorisation to attend, then you can accompany me as my official assistant and interpreter! What do you think?...



It would be very dangerous! I cannot...

Come on, Francis! You and I have been through worse! Besides, I ought to tell you that Professor Ilyushin is on the guest list—and is also an old acquaintance. He might have some information for us!



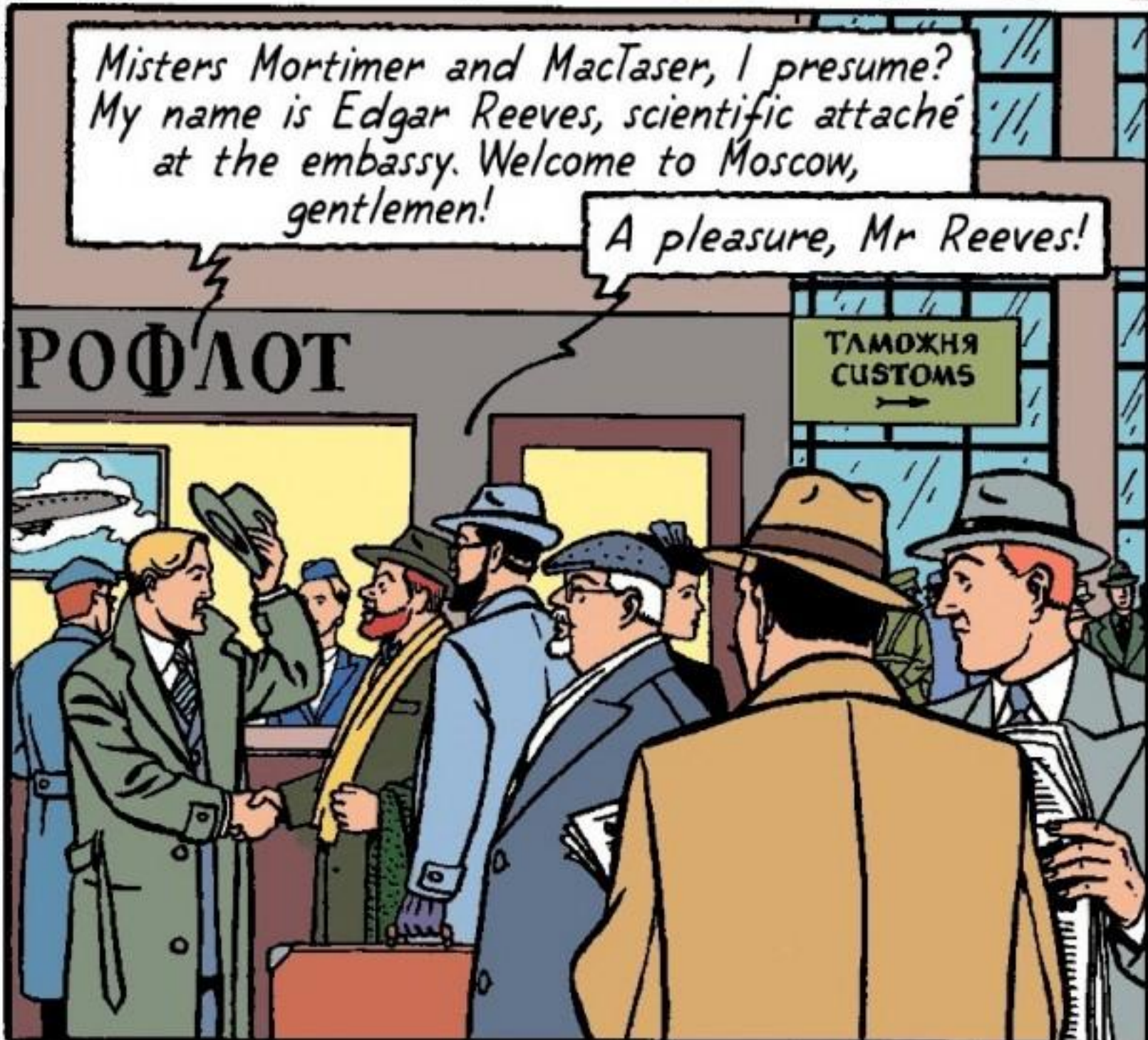
Hmm... Your arguments are solid. Besides... I know you well enough to understand that it'd be a waste of my time to try and dissuade you. So be it, then! And... thank you!

Perfect! You take care of the visas. Meanwhile, before we go, I'll put together a team who will—hope—be able to tackle these bacteria Z when we come back...

*CENTRE FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH

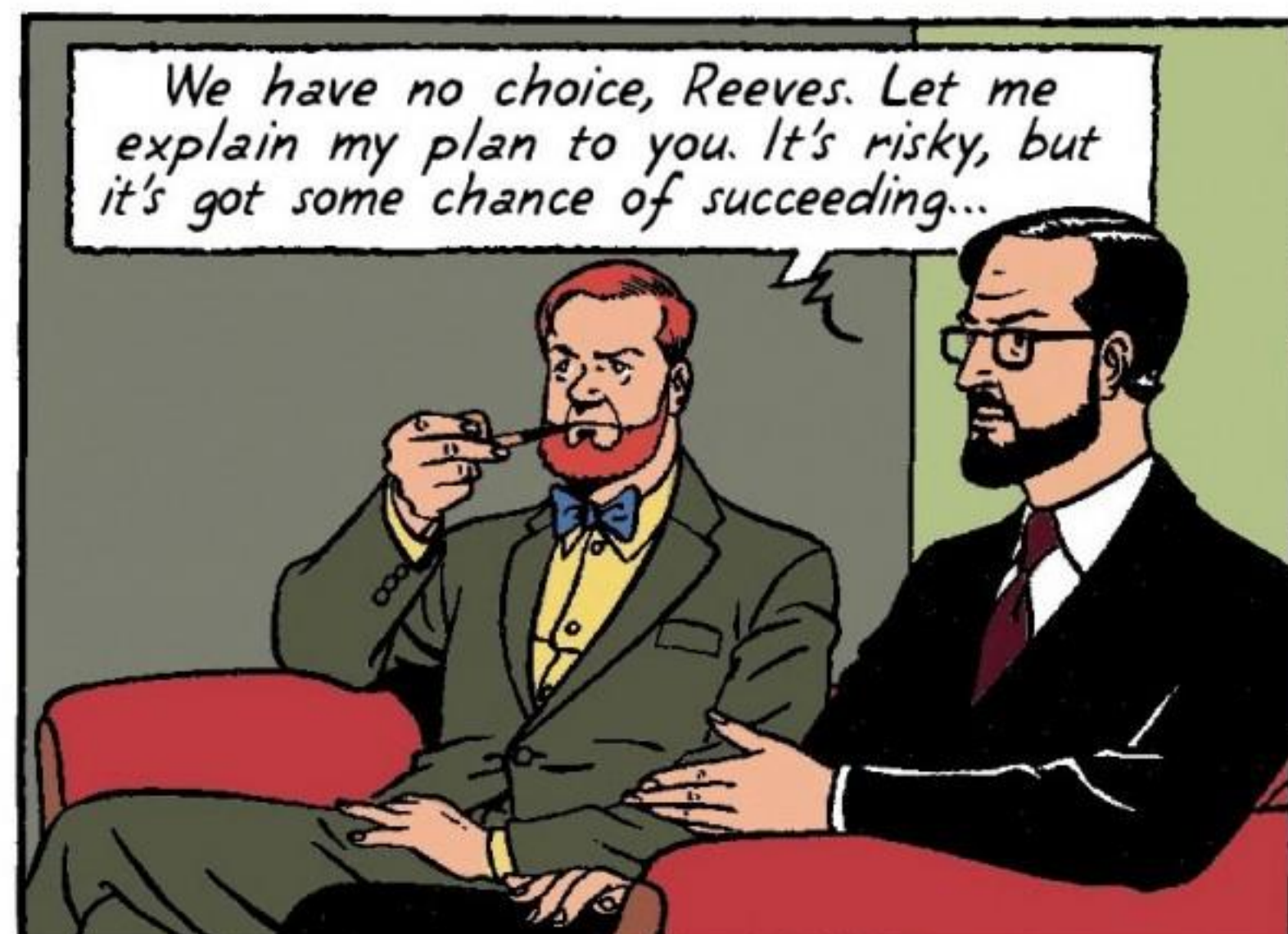
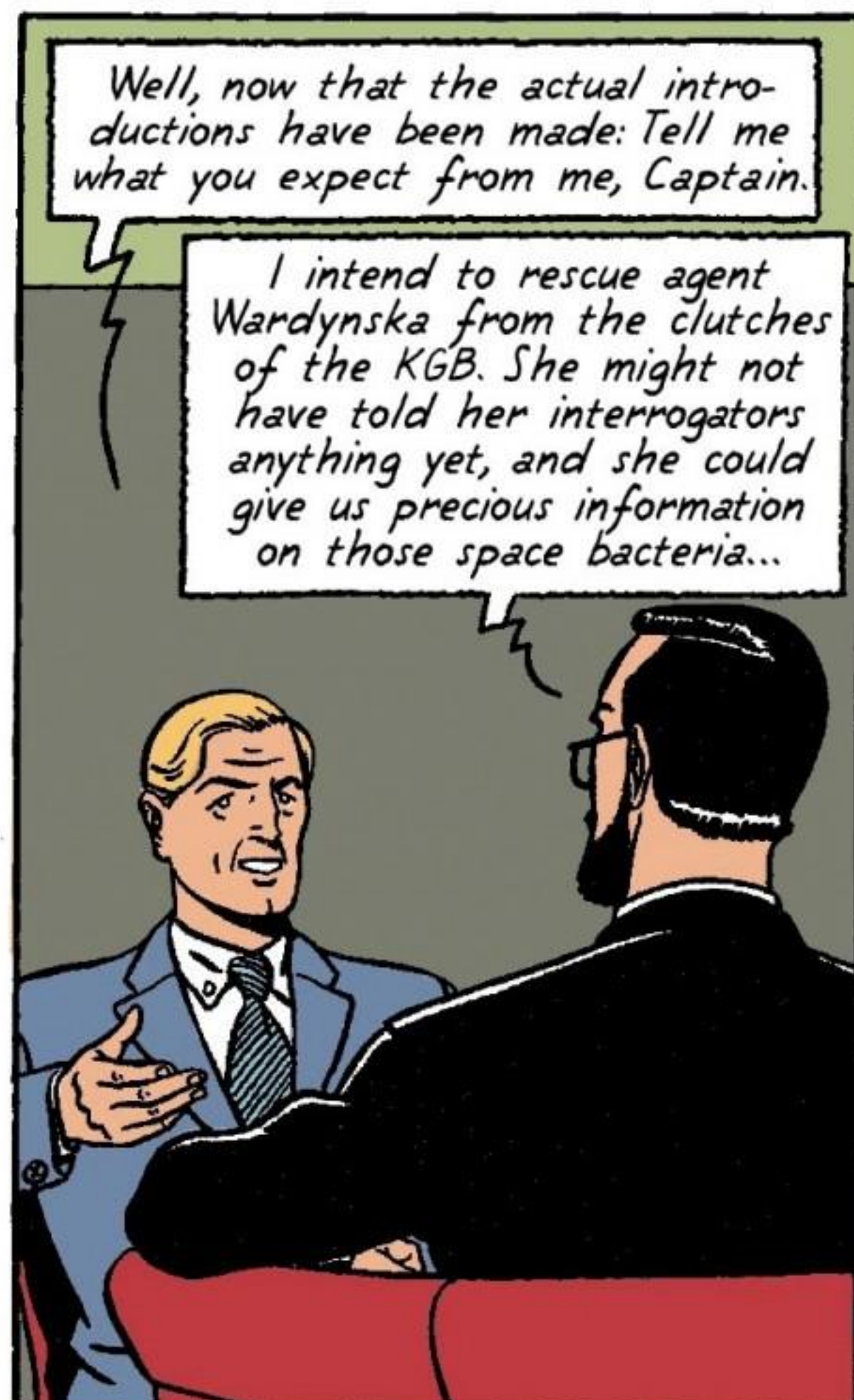


AFTER SUBMITTING TO CUSTOMS CONTROL AND HAVING RECOVERED THEIR LUGGAGE, THE PASSENGERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE AIRPORT'S GREAT HALL—WHERE A MAN FULL OF BRITISH DISTINCTION IS WAITING FOR THEM...



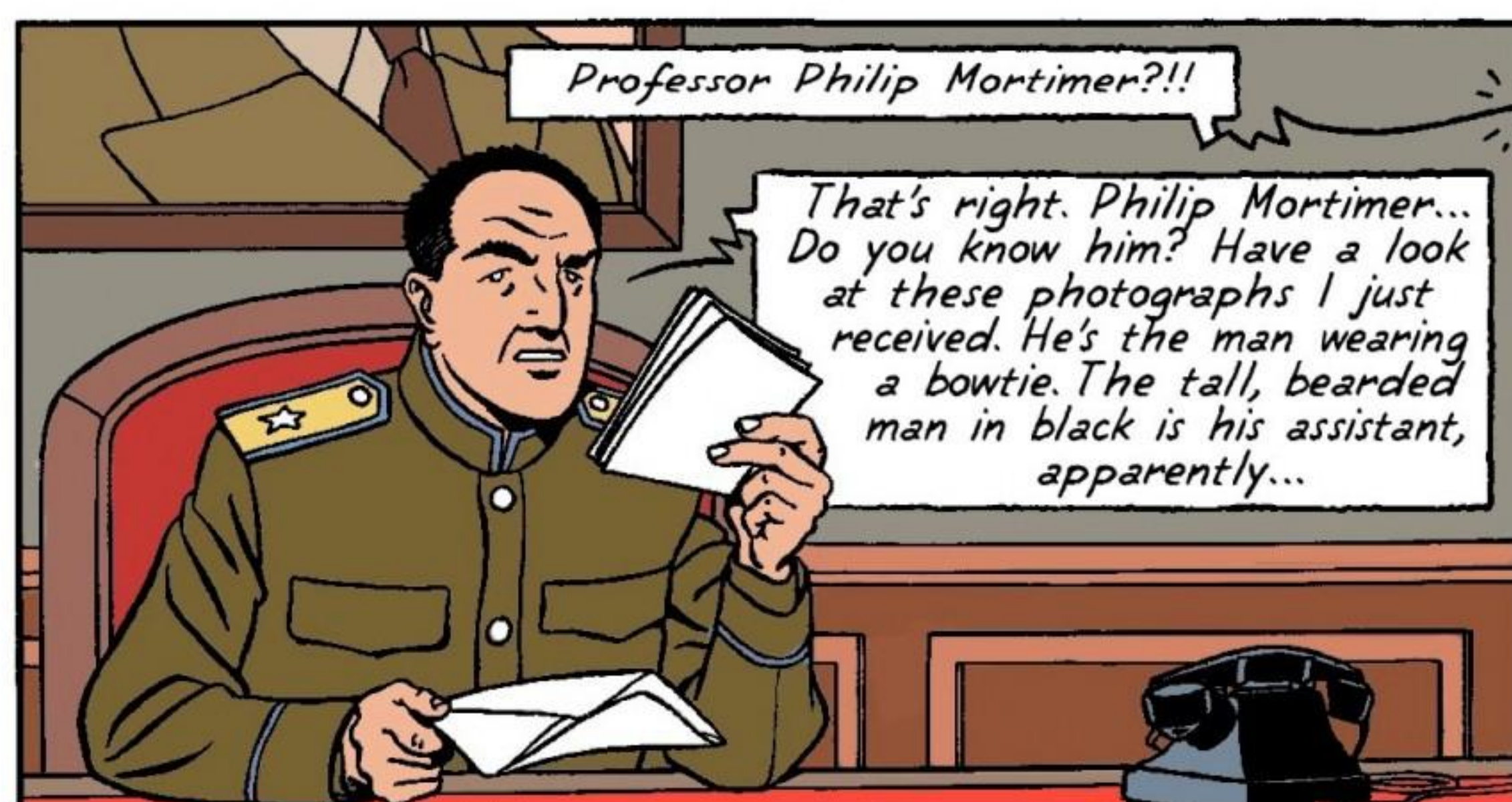
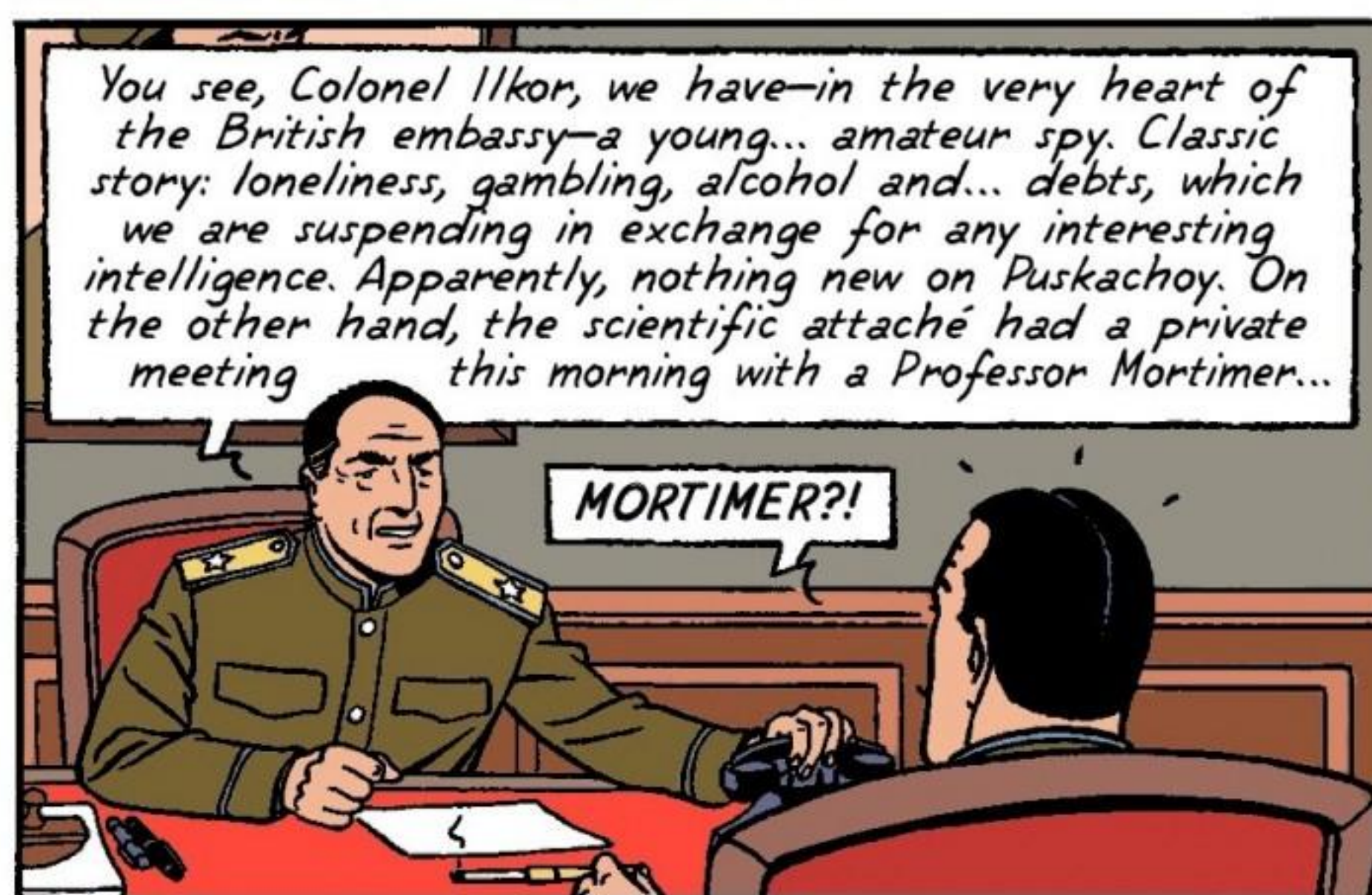
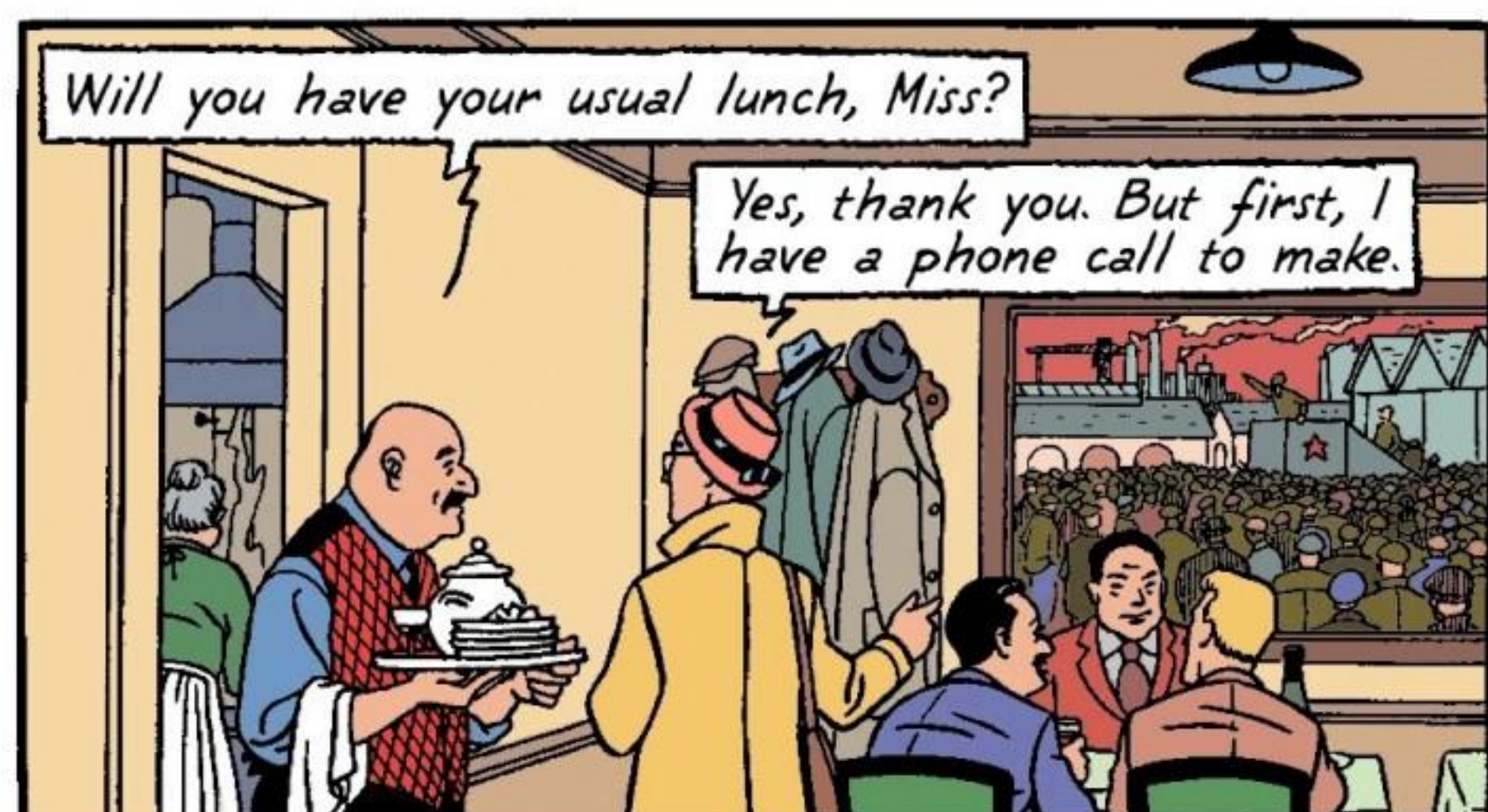
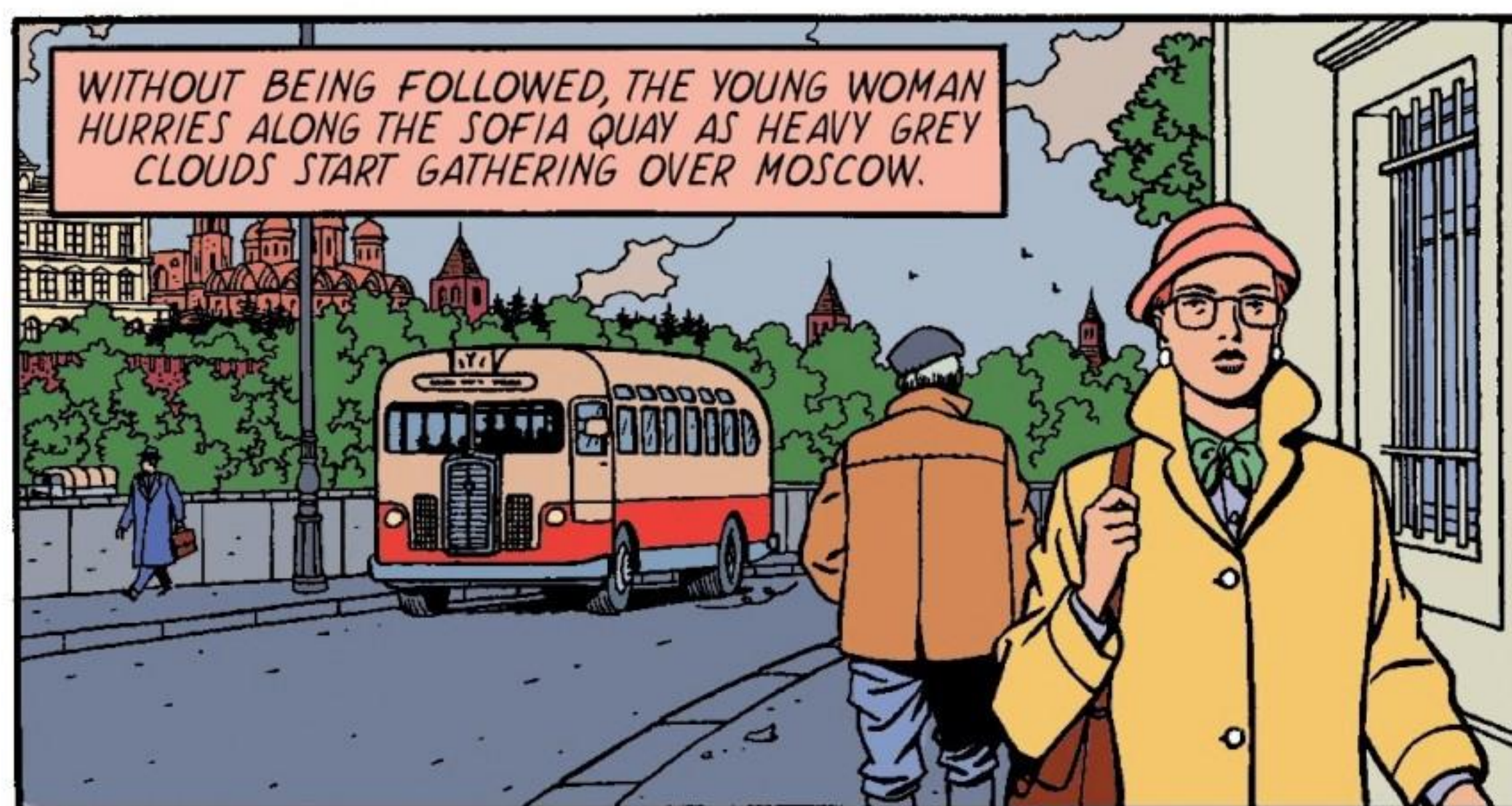
UPON THEIR ARRIVAL, THE PROFESSOR AND HIS ASSISTANT RECEIVE A WARM WELCOME FROM LORD GREYMOUTH, AMBASSADOR OF THE BRITISH CROWN IN MOSCOW...



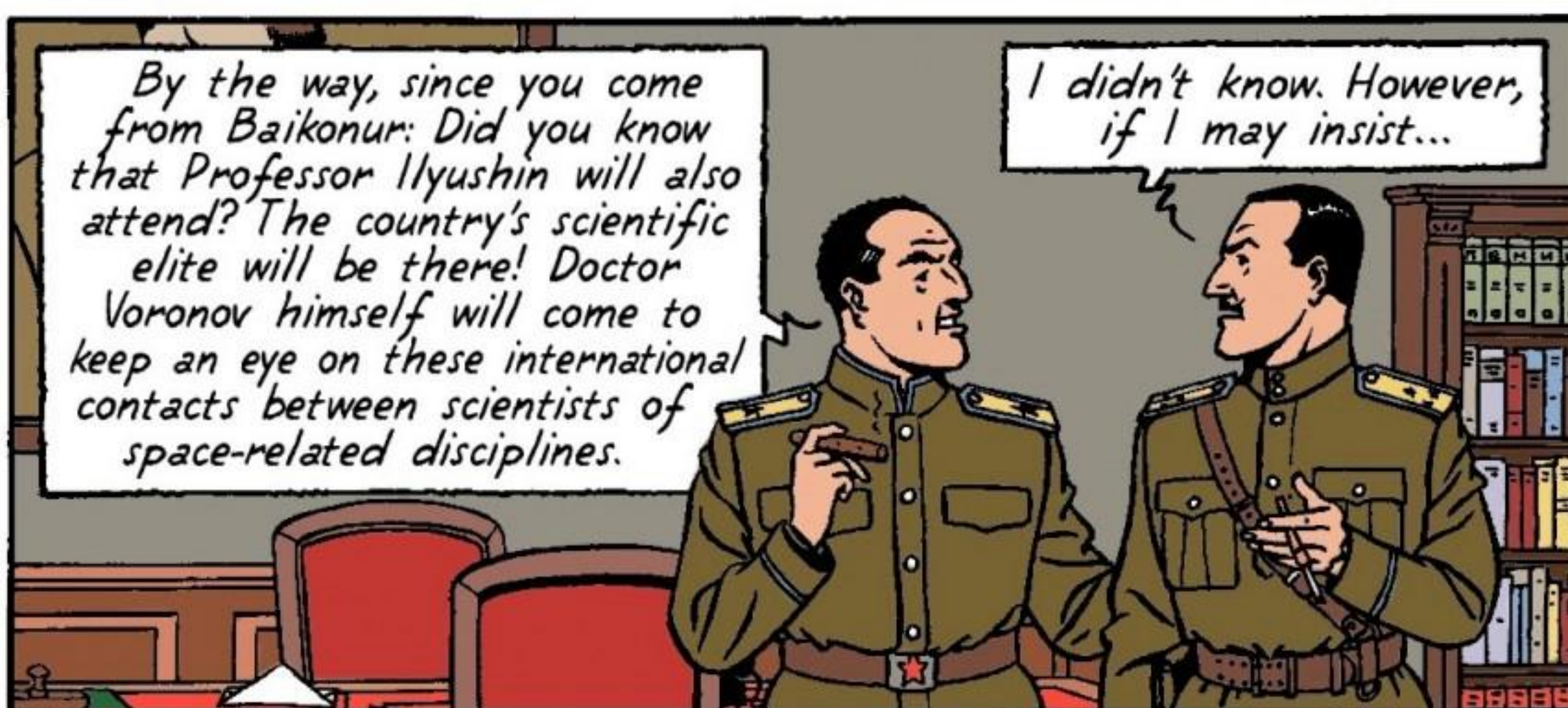
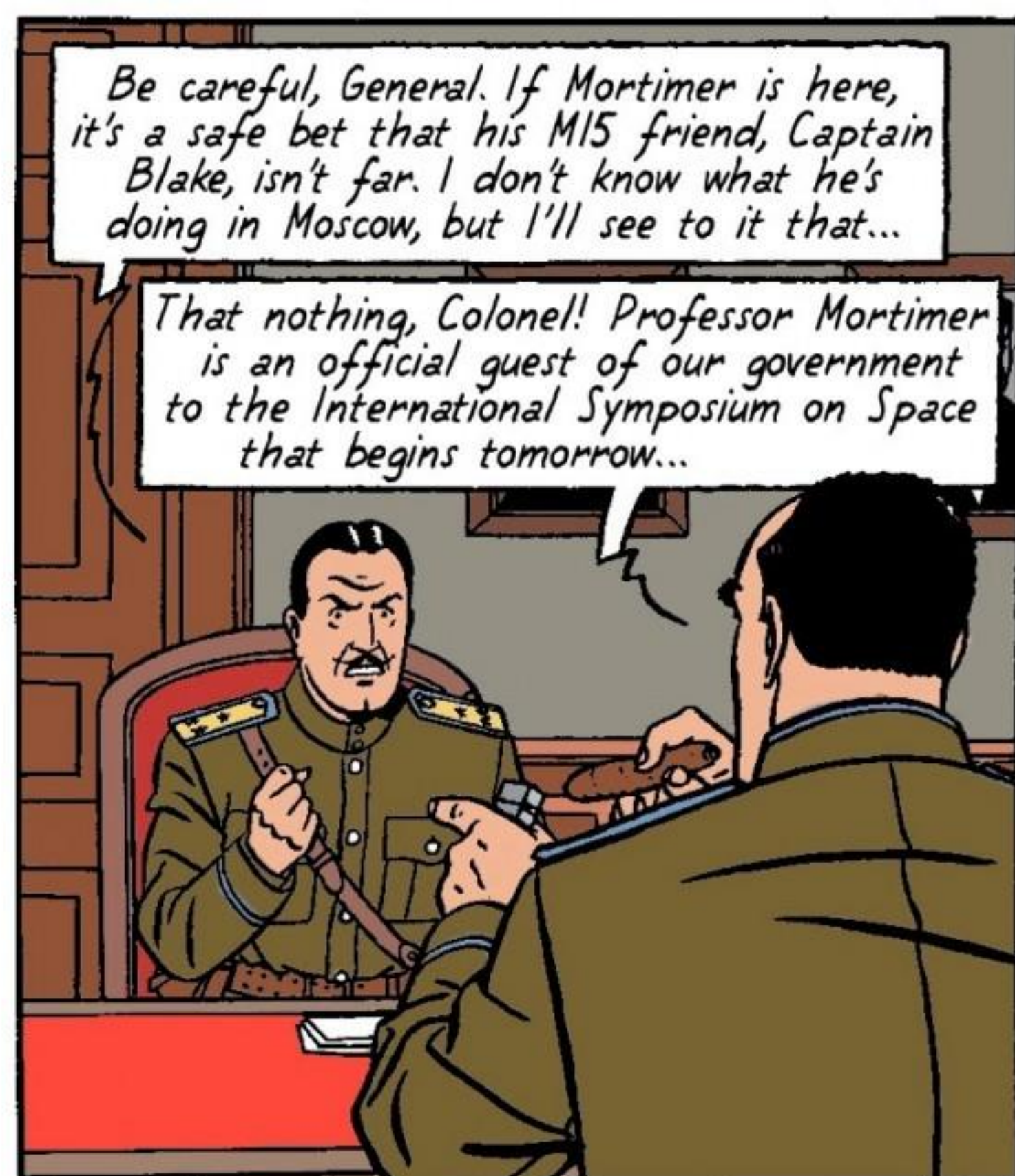
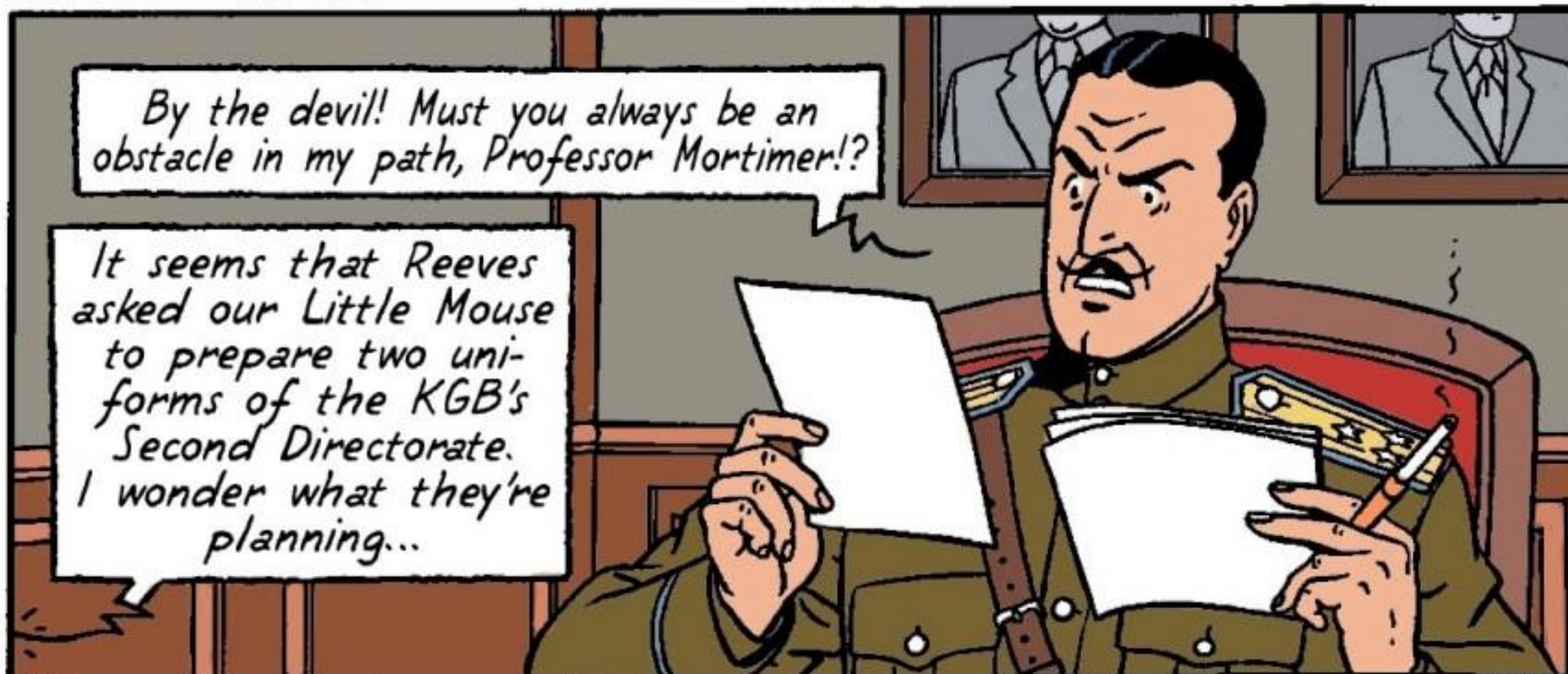


VISIBLY INTRIGUED, THE YOUNG WOMAN TRIES TO SNEAK A PEEK AT HER BOSS'S MYSTERIOUS GUESTS AS HE DISAPPEARS BACK INTO THE "ISLAND"...





RECOGNISING THE MAN WHO'S SO OFTEN THWARTED HIS PLANS, OLRİK—FOR IT IS HE HIDING BEHIND THE ANAGRAM ILKOR—CAN'T CONTAIN HIS RAGE...



* LISTENING!



THE NEXT MORNING, EDGAR REEVES, PROFESSOR MORTIMER AND HIS ASSISTANT LEAVE THE BRITISH EMBASSY ABOARD THE OFFICIAL BENTLEY...



FOLLOWED BY A BLACK VOLGA, THE LIMOUSINE DRIVES SWIFTLY ALONG THE STREETS OF MOSCOW...



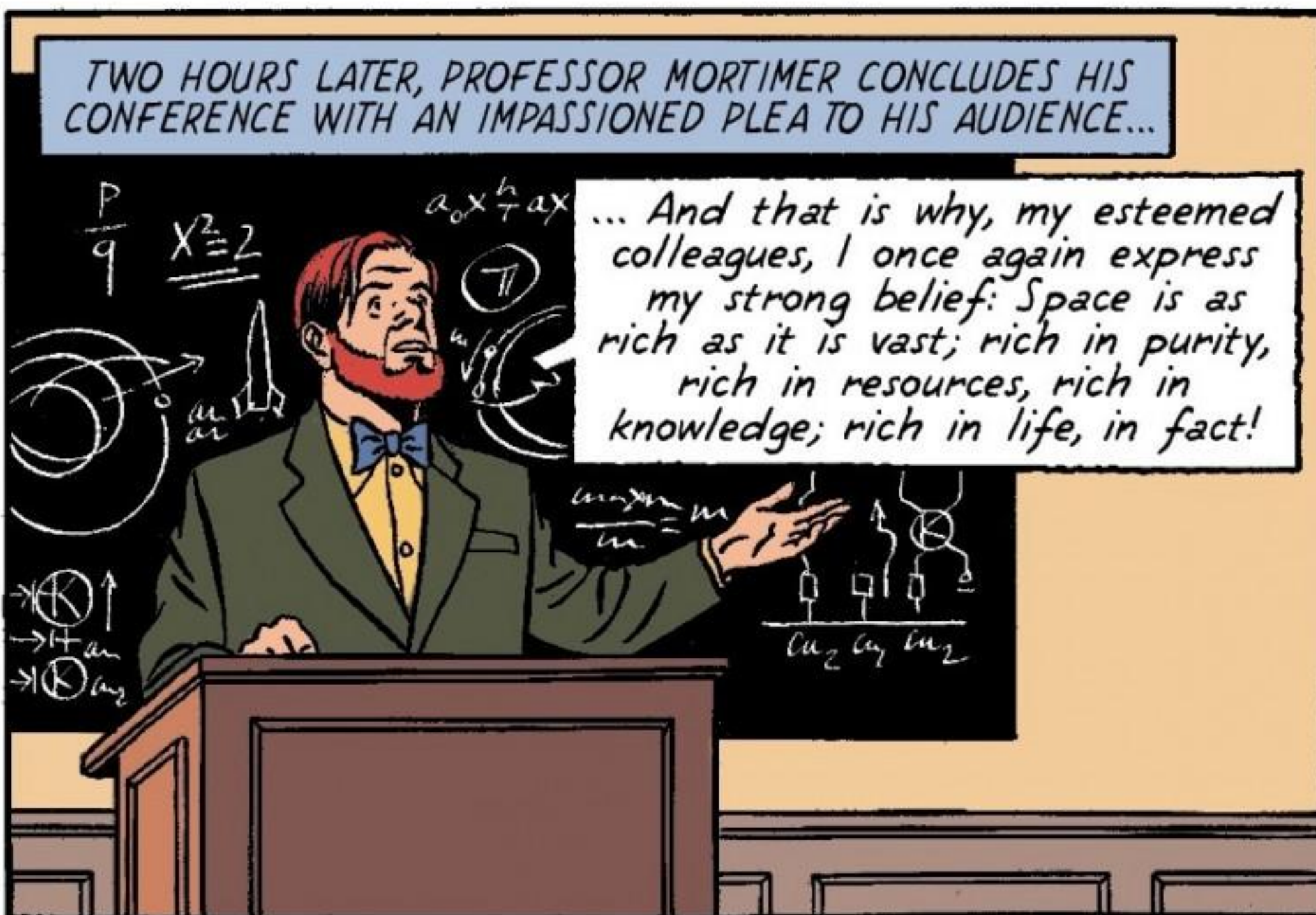
... AND ARRIVES AT LOMONOSOV UNIVERSITY.



PREEMPTING THE OFFICIALS TASKED WITH WELCOMING THE DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN RUSHES TOWARDS HIS OLD FRIEND MORTIMER.

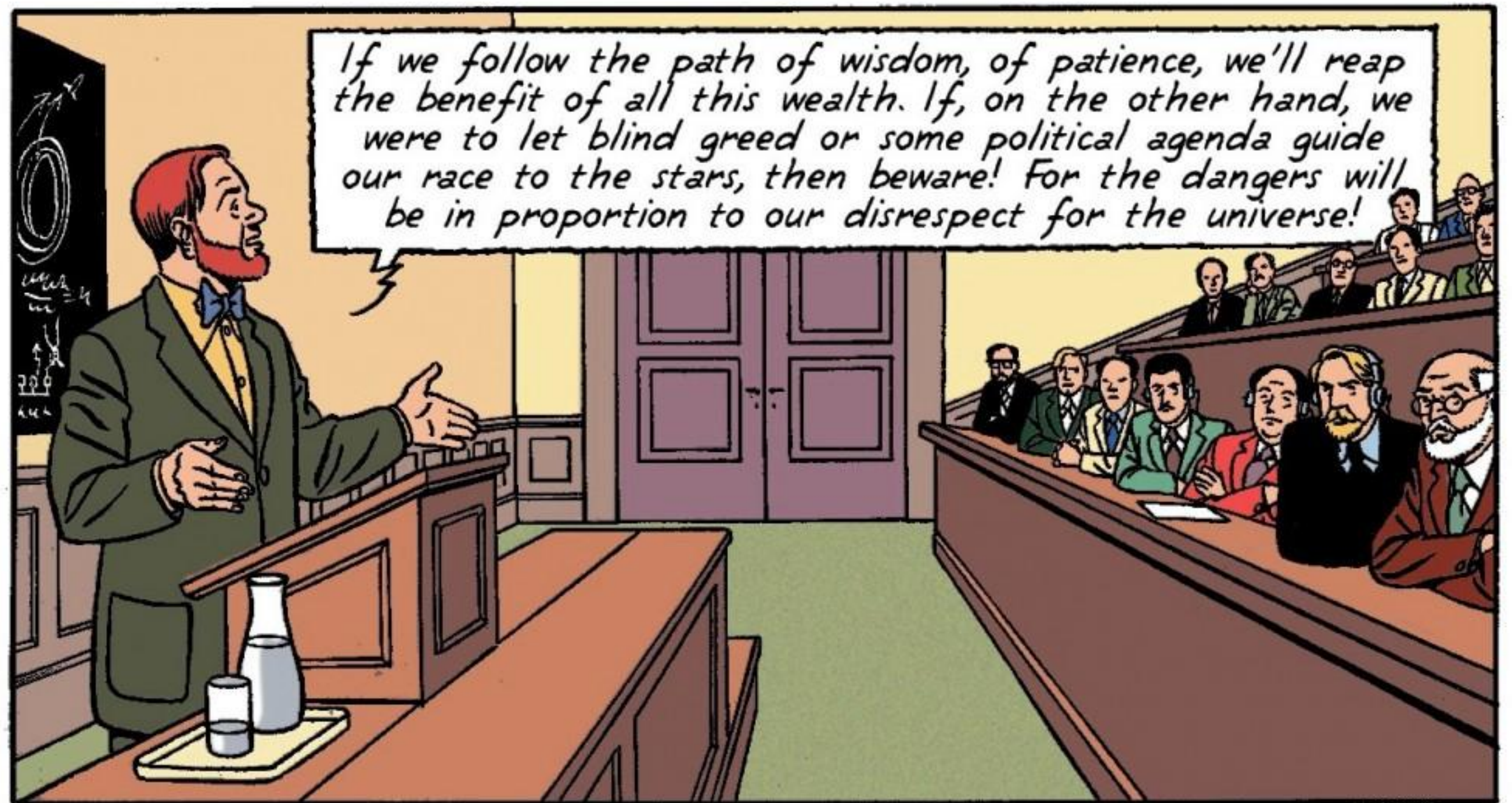
Philip! I didn't dare hope. How good it is to see you again, my friend! We are eager to hear you speak!

Piotr! How are you?!



TWO HOURS LATER, PROFESSOR MORTIMER CONCLUDES HIS CONFERENCE WITH AN IMPASSIONED PLEA TO HIS AUDIENCE...

... And that is why, my esteemed colleagues, I once again express my strong belief: Space is as rich as it is vast; rich in purity, rich in resources, rich in knowledge; rich in life, in fact!



If we follow the path of wisdom, of patience, we'll reap the benefit of all this wealth. If, on the other hand, we were to let blind greed or some political agenda guide our race to the stars, then beware! For the dangers will be in proportion to our disrespect for the universe!

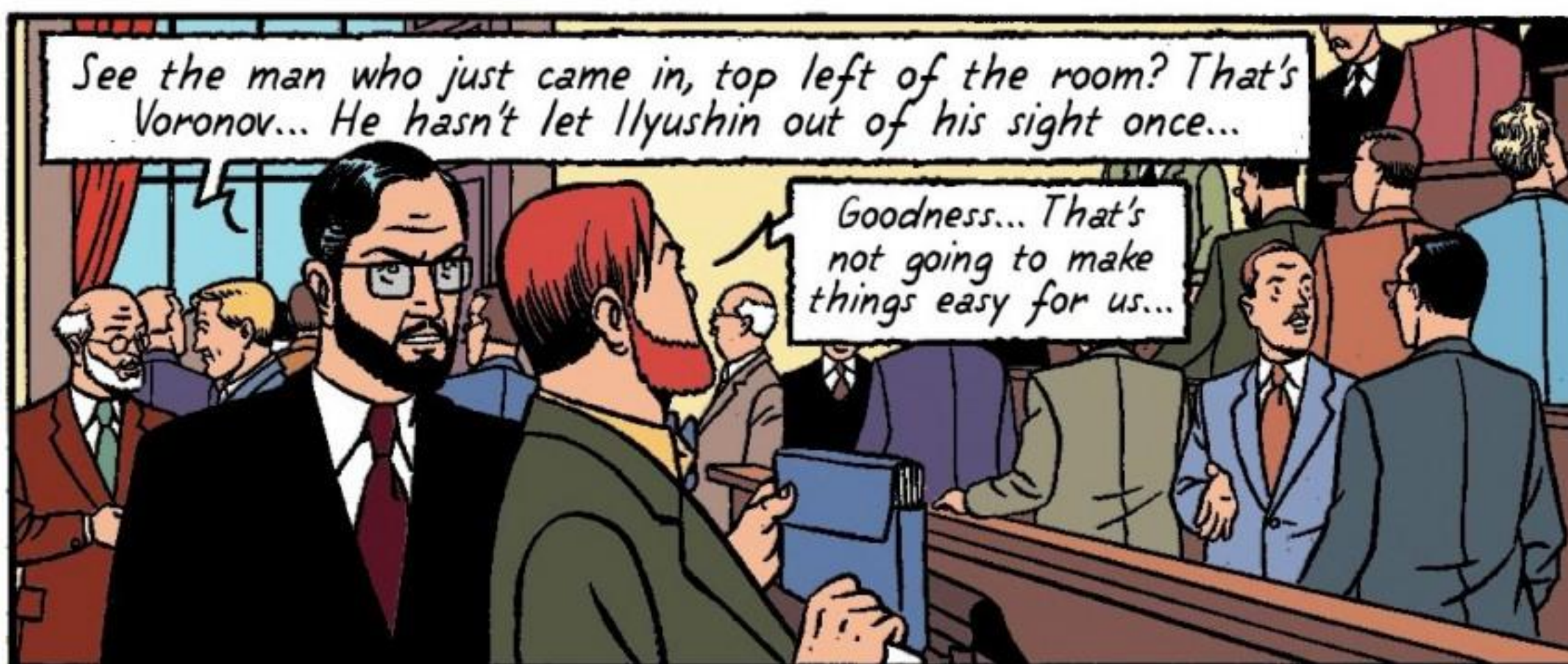


TOUCHED BY THE SINCERITY AND TRUTH IN HIS WORDS, THE AUDIENCE RESPONDS TO MORTIMER WITH THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

Bravo!

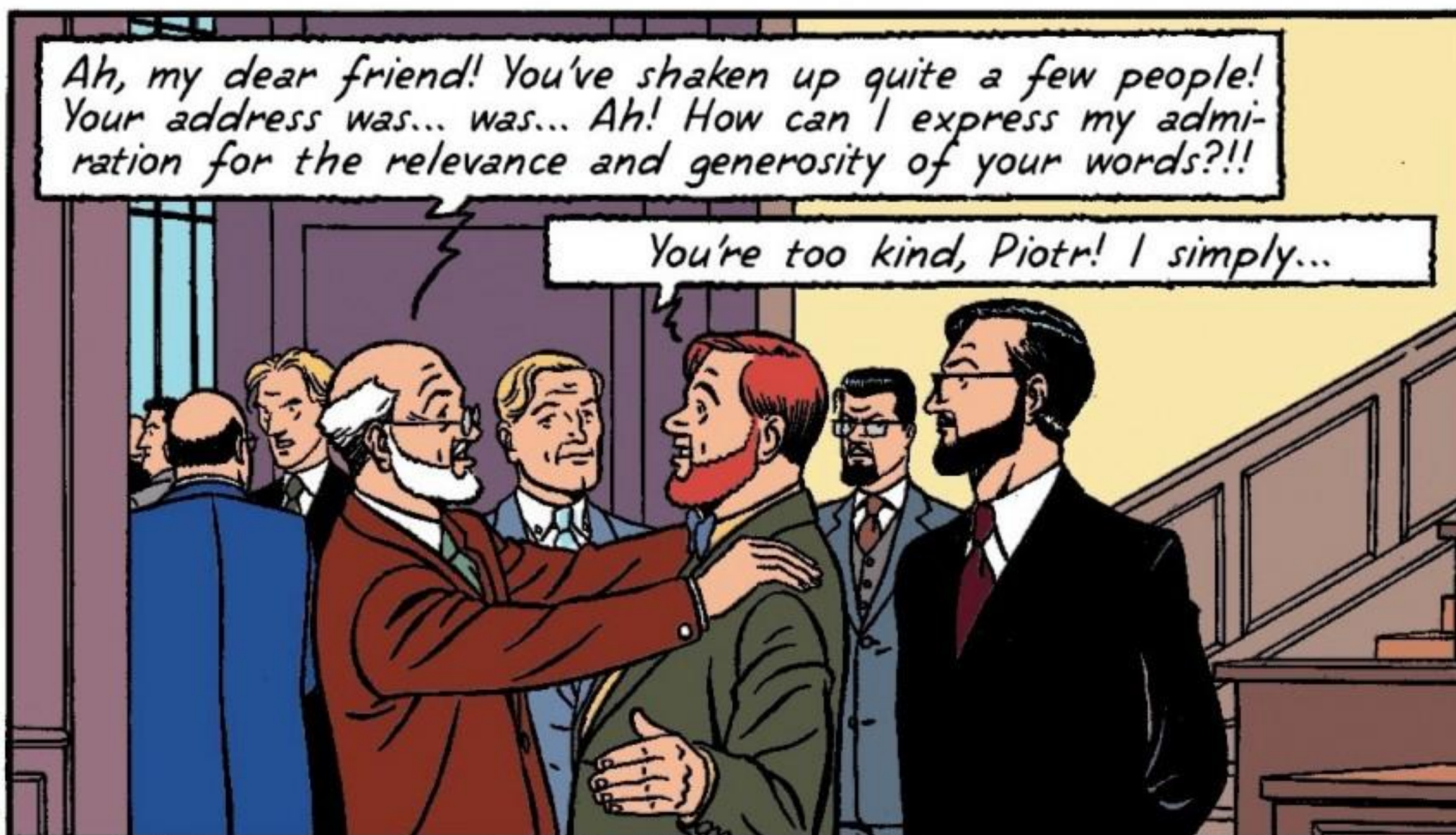
браво!

Bravo!



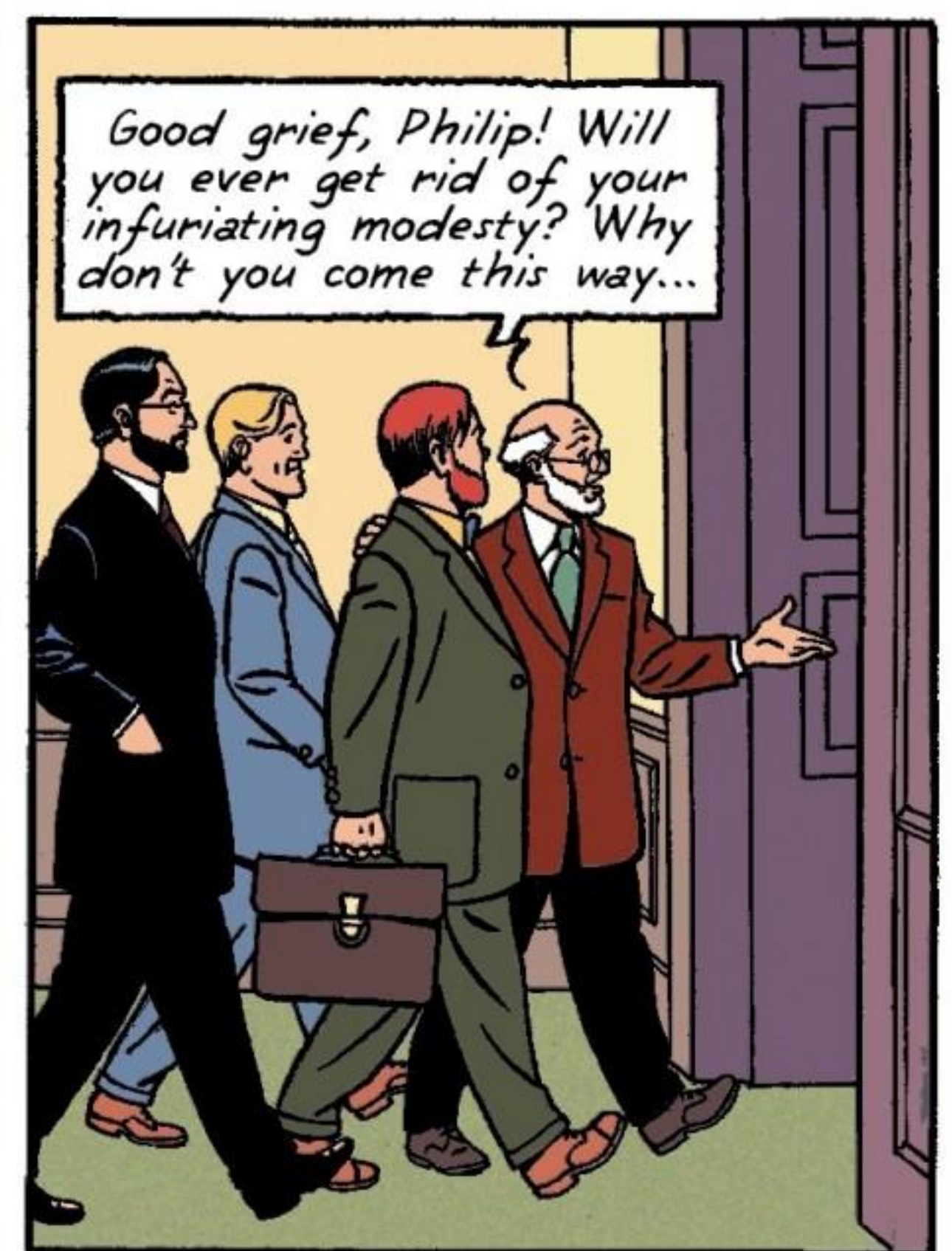
See the man who just came in, top left of the room? That's Voronov... He hasn't let Ilyushin out of his sight once...

Goodness... That's not going to make things easy for us...



Ah, my dear friend! You've shaken up quite a few people! Your address was... was... Ah! How can I express my admiration for the relevance and generosity of your words?!!

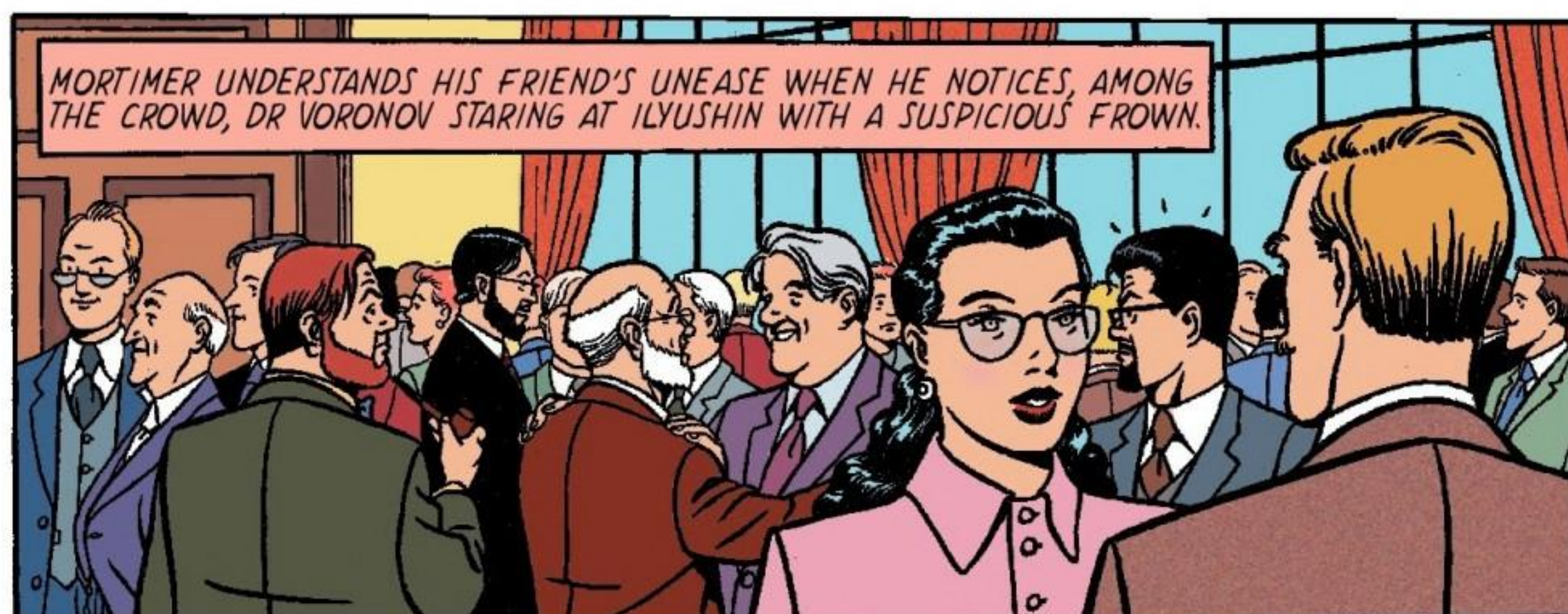
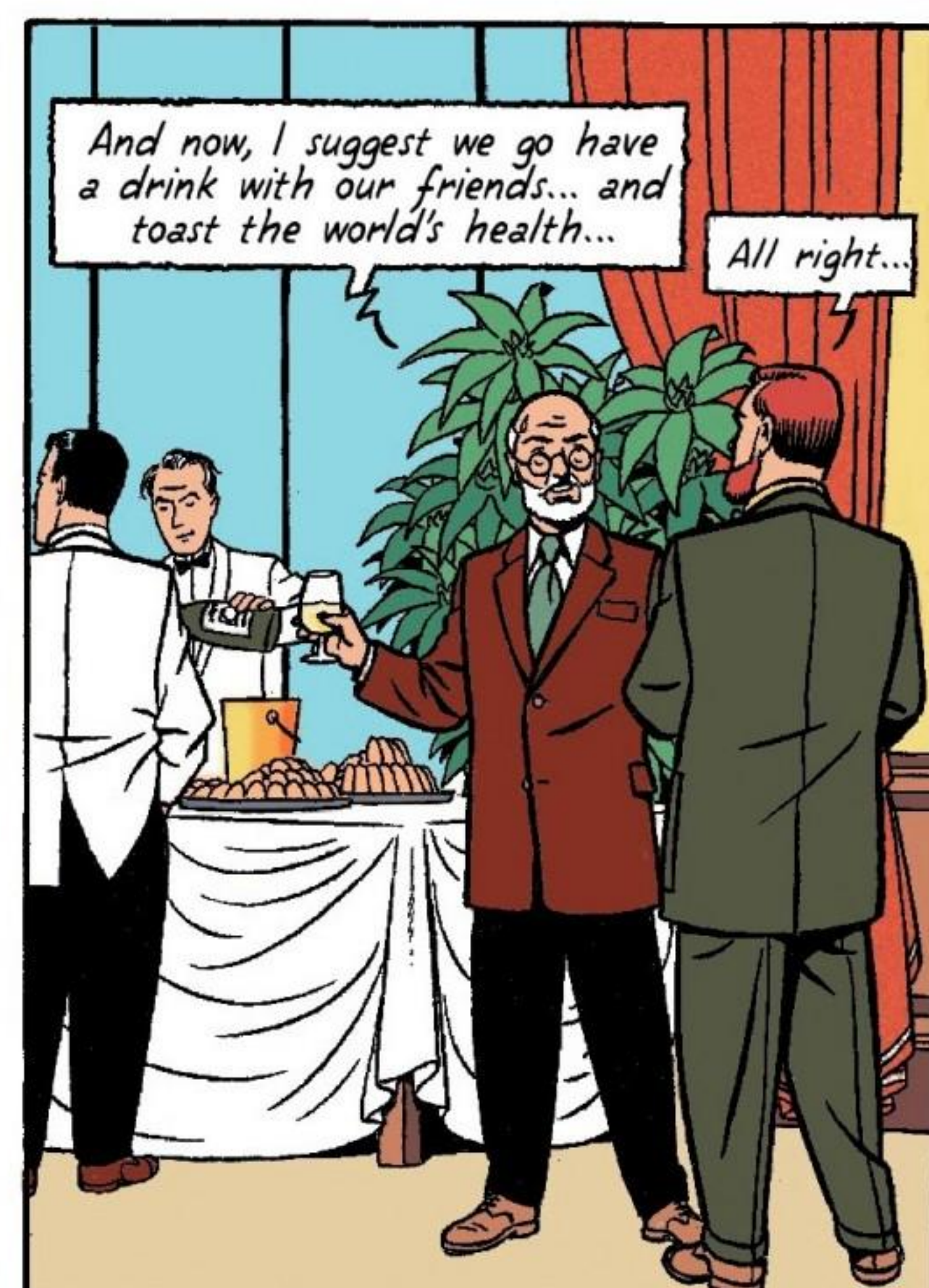
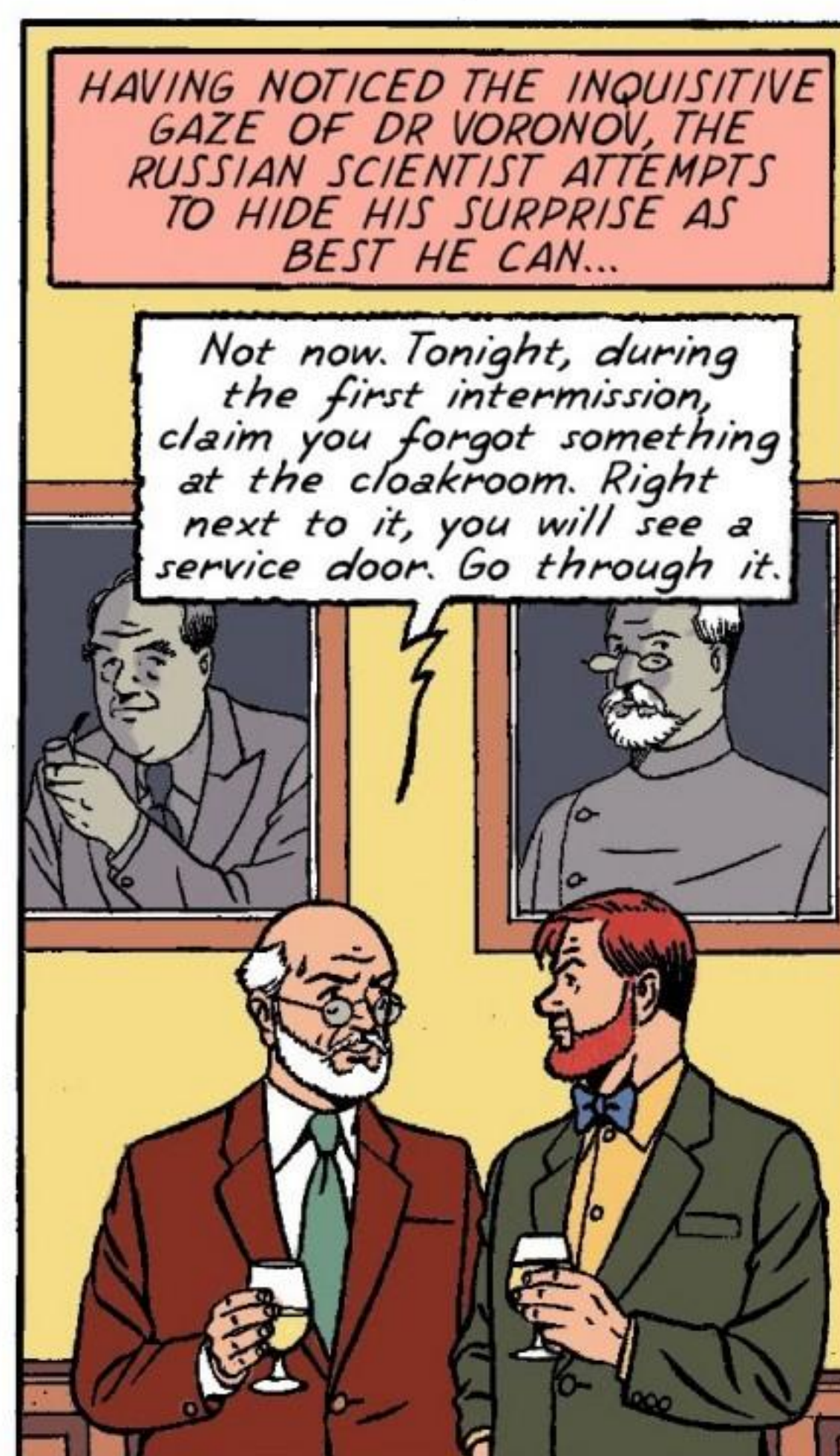
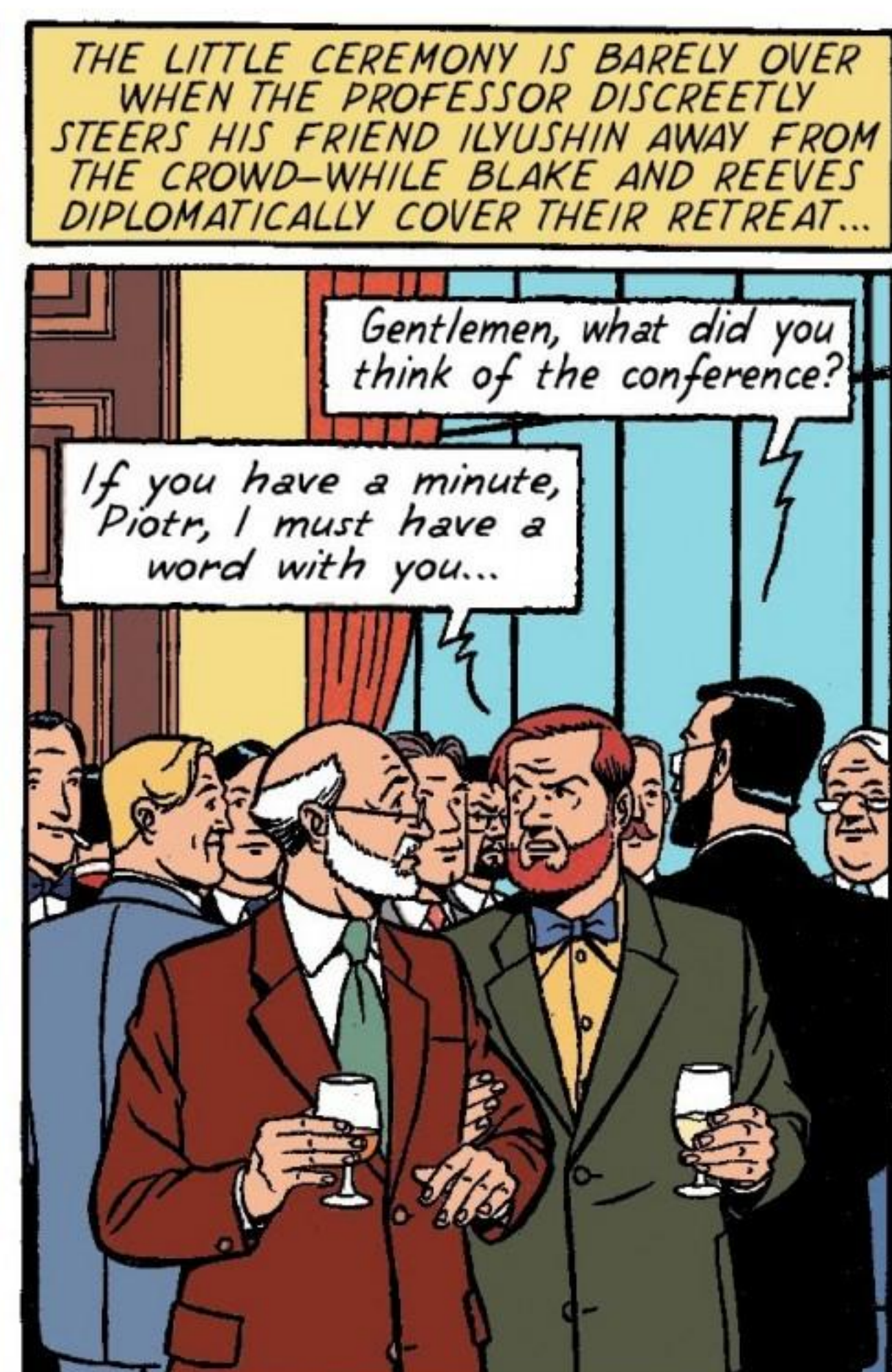
You're too kind, Piotr! I simply...



Good grief, Philip! Will you ever get rid of your infuriating modesty? Why don't you come this way...



We'll toast the success of the conference!...



AFTER AN HOUR OF MUSIC, THE GUESTS ARE OFFERED A FIRST INTERMISSION...

This is the agreed-upon moment. I'm going...

Be careful, Philip, I beg you!

AS MORTIMER HURRIEDLY LEAVES THE BOX FOR GUESTS OF HONOUR, PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN ALSO ABANDONS HIS SEAT IN THE STALLS.

Well, well!... Where is it that you're going so quickly, my dear professors?...

HAVING REACHED THE SERVICE DOOR NEAR THE CLOAKROOM, MORTIMER MAKES SURE THAT NO ONE IS PAYING ATTENTION TO HIM.

WITHOUT HESITATION, HE OPENS THE DOOR AND PUSHES INTO THE DARKNESS OF A SERVICE STAIRCASE.

Piotr?

Lower your voice, Philip. We must be extremely careful... Follow me...

MOMENTS LATER, PROFESSOR MORTIMER AND HIS FRIEND STEP ONTO THE STAGEHANDS' CATWALK, JUST ABOVE THE STAGE.

Here we are. I believe this is the most out-of-the-way spot in the whole building...

Piotr, we know that deadly bacteria from space were recovered by Voronov in Baikonur, and...

... and you managed to have a sample sent to you. I know. My assistant told me about Voronov's fury when he learned he'd been duped. What can I do for you?

We think that Voronov wants to use the bacteria as a weapon against the West. As soon as we have the sample, we'll be able to study it to develop a vaccine. Could you point my research in a specific direction?

Unfortunately, I never had access to the laboratory...

... All I know is that the youngest lab rats did...

CLACK

SHUT UP, YOU TRAITOR!!

AS VORONOV TRIGGERS THE CATWALK'S RETRACTION MECHANISM, IT COLLAPSES SUDDENLY. BEFORE PROFESSOR ILYUSHIN'S HORRIFIED EYES, MORTIMER IS SENT PLUMMETING INTO NOTHINGNESS.

?! WHAT THE...?

WITH A GREAT METALLIC NOISE, THE CATWALK ENDS UP AT A RIGHT ANGLE TO ITS PREVIOUS POSITION. MORTIMER MANAGES TO HANG ON BY ONE HAND, DESPITE THE OBVIOUS JOLT.

CLANG

CALMLY, DR VORONOV WALKS TO THE EDGE OF THE CATWALK AND LOOKS DOWN AT MORTIMER.

Your status as an official guest may allow you to give subversive speeches with all impunity, Professor. But it doesn't give you the right to play spy! You'll have to face the consequences now!

HA! HA! HA!

YOU BRIGAND!

Oh, one more thing, Professor. If you must fall, be so kind as to avoid hitting the orchestra. I'd like to enjoy the rest of the concert.

ONCE VORONOV IS GONE, MORTIMER STARTS TO FEEL HIS STRENGTH FAILING...

EXHAUSTED, THE PROFESSOR IS ABOUT TO LOSE HIS GRIP WHEN, SUDDENLY...



Hold on tight, Philip! I'm raising the catwalk!

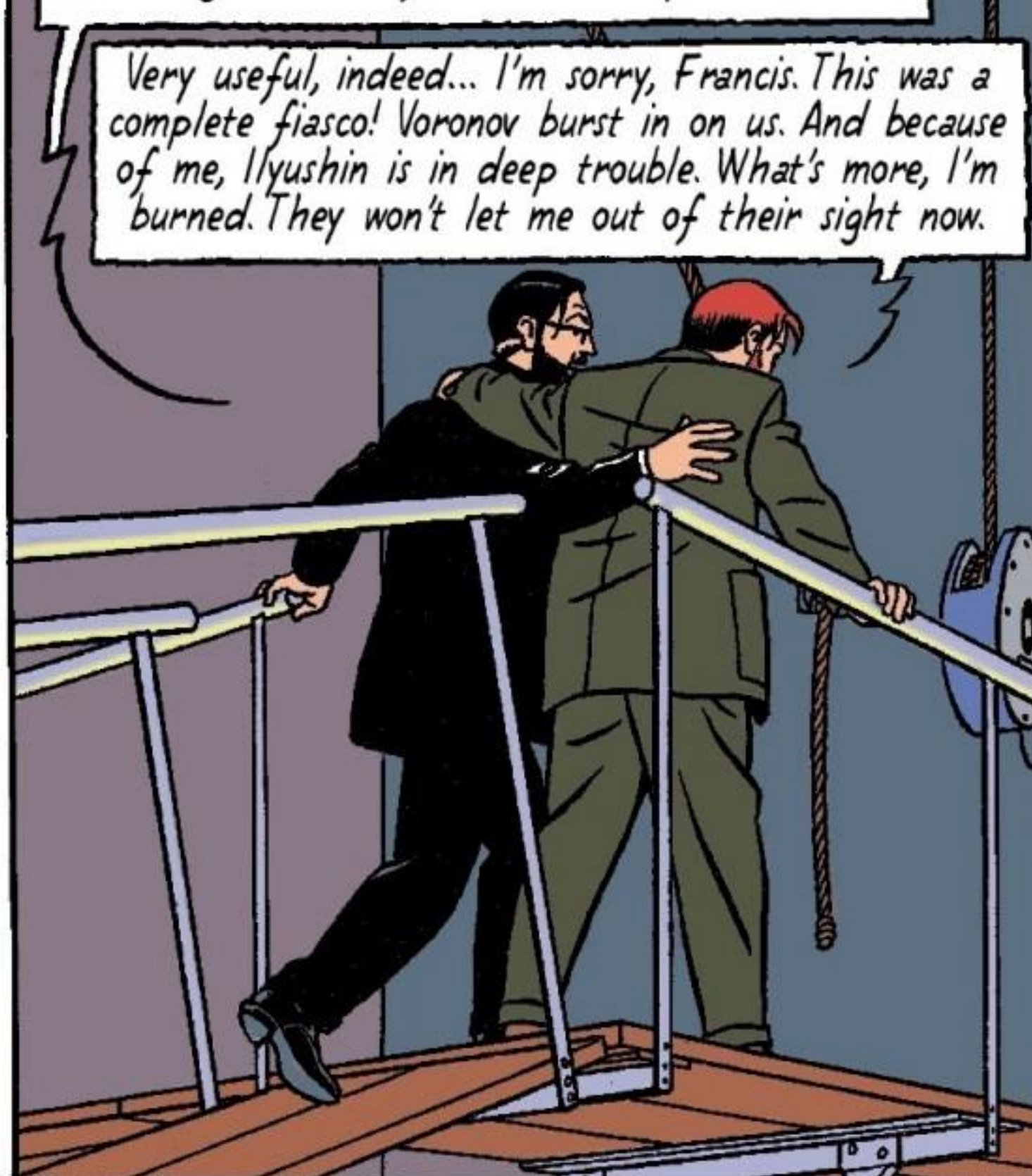
Francis?!

A NEW SURGE OF HOPE GIVES MORTIMER ENOUGH ENERGY TO HOLD ON UNTIL HIS RESCUER HAS RAISED THE CATWALK ENOUGH TO COME TO HIS AID.



Well, old chap... pfff... You... you got here just in time! I... pfff... I was about to let go... How... did you...

I had Voronov in my sights. He was keeping his eye on you, and when you exited the box, he also left the concert room. I figured it might be useful to watch your back!



Very useful, indeed... I'm sorry, Francis. This was a complete fiasco! Voronov burst in on us. And because of me, Ilyushin is in deep trouble. What's more, I'm burned. They won't let me out of their sight now.

It was a risk to take, old chap. We still have the other plan for tomorrow. Until then, we'll play at being the perfect guests. When we get back into the box, smile and act as if you were completely happy with your evening. That's part of the spy trade...



MAY 4, 6:00 PM. ON DZERZHINSKY SQUARE, A VOLGA STOPS IN FRONT OF THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE KGB SECOND DIRECTORATE—THE USSR'S INFAMOUS SECRET POLICE...



So, we're agreed, Reeves. You wait for me here. If I'm not back in 20 minutes—or if you see that things are taking a turn for the worse—leave without me.

This is madness, Captain. It's not too late...



Not another word, Reeves. The guards are watching us. Just wish me luck instead.

All right... Good luck, sir!

UNDER THE GUARDS' WATCHFUL EYES, BLAKE RESOLUTELY GETS OUT OF THE CAR...



... NOT SUSPECTING THAT HE IS WALKING INTO A TRAP...



Ha! Ha! Ha! Very nice disguise, Captain! But you'd have to get up early to put one over on this old horse!

... AND ENTERS THE SINISTER-LOOKING BUILDING WITHOUT HESITATION.



Colonel Dykrischev from Yassenevo* Headquarters. I've been ordered to take custody of the spy Wardynska; she's to be interrogated by us. Here are my orders.



Hmm, hmm... Everything seems to be fine.



TO BLAKE'S ENORMOUS RELIEF, THE SOLDIER HANDS HIM BACK HIS ORDERS.

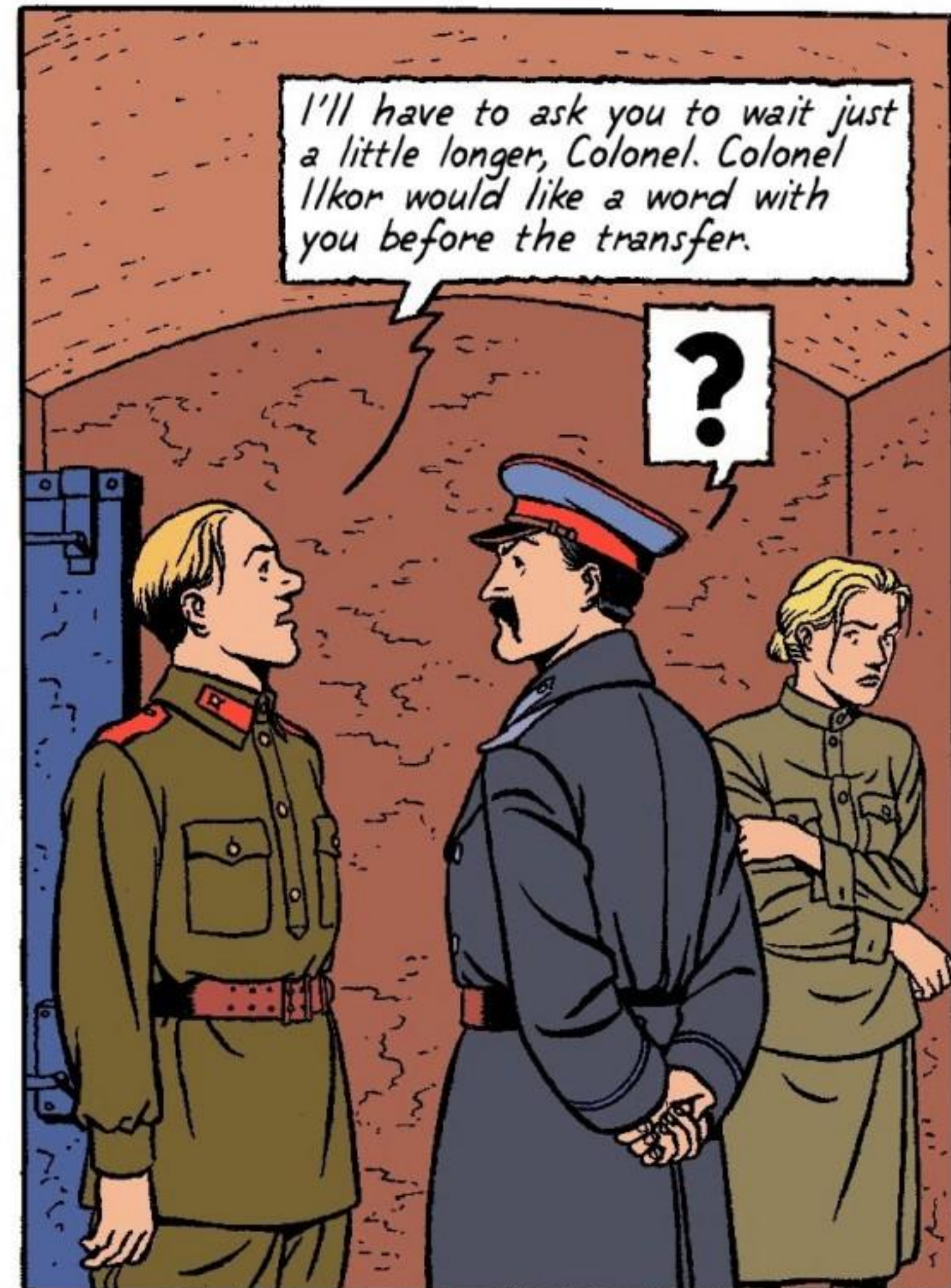
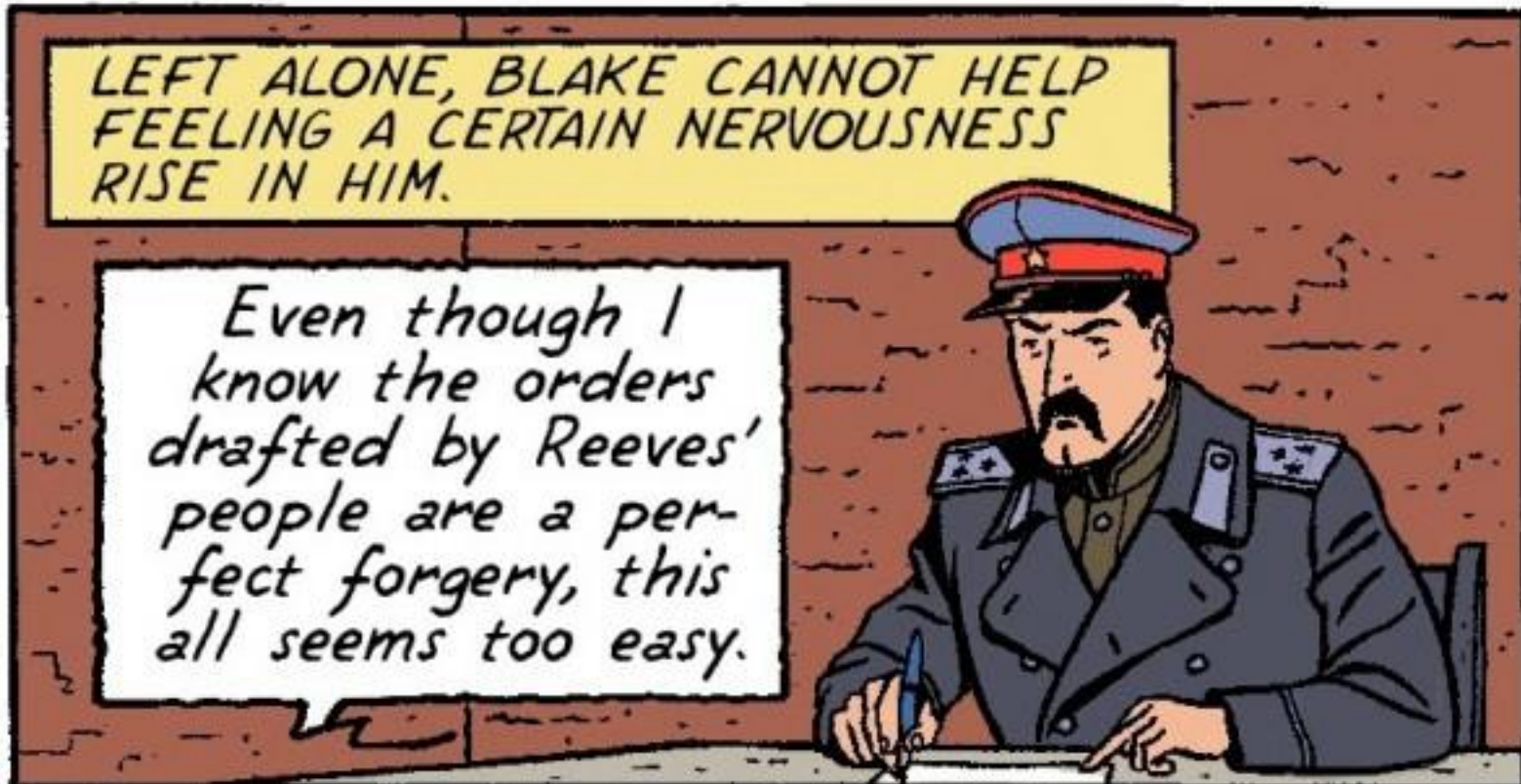
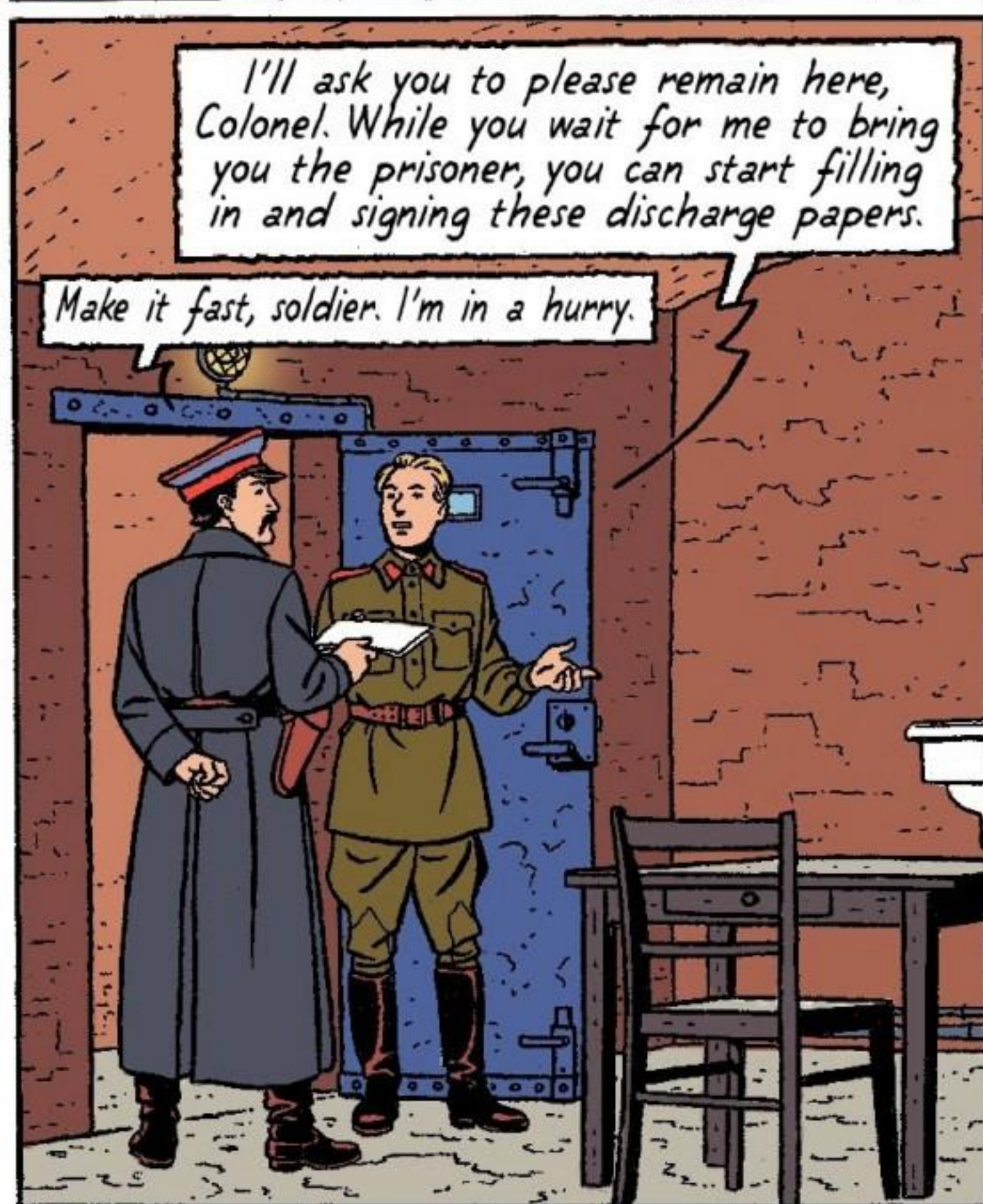
If you'll follow me, Colonel.

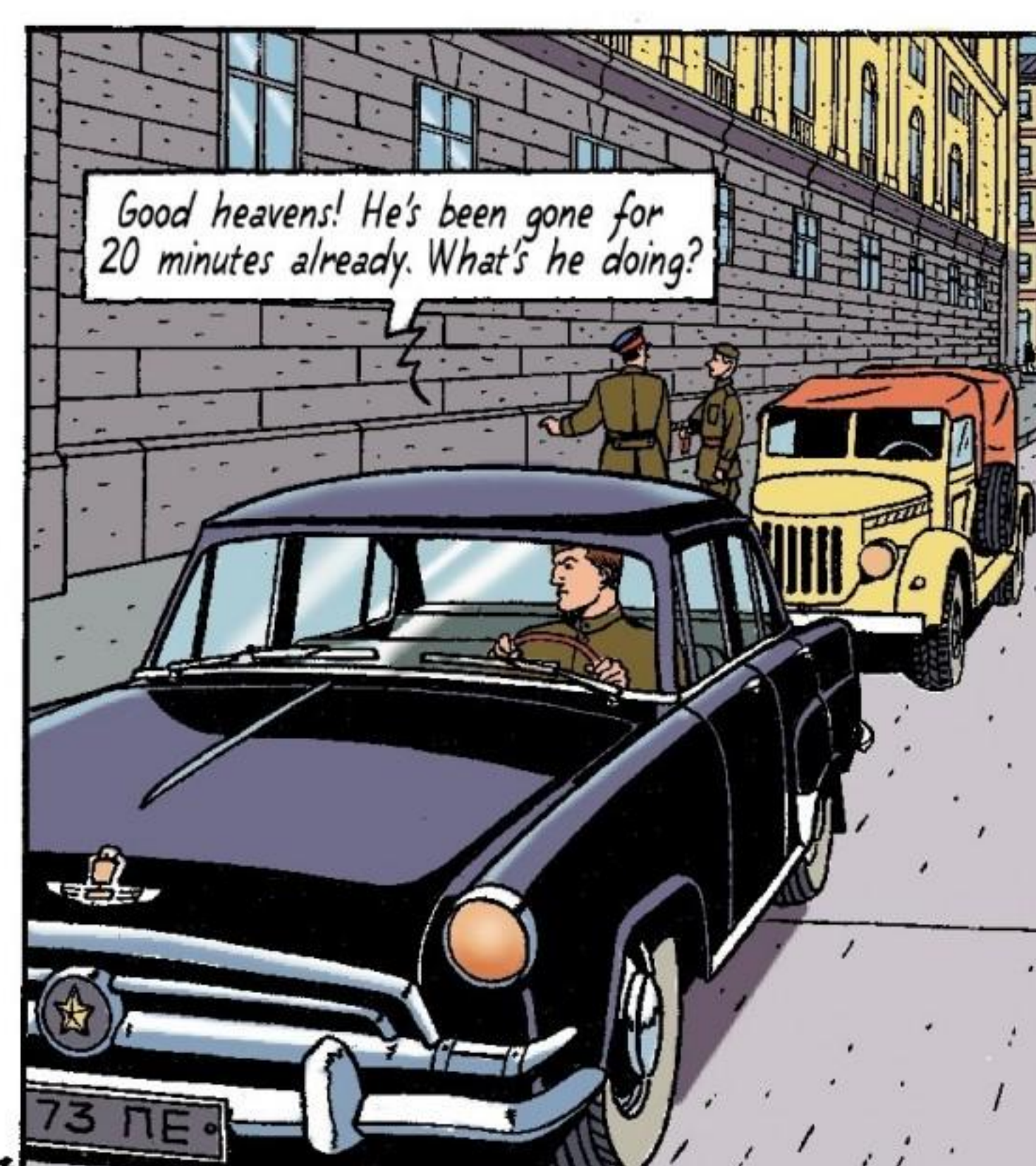
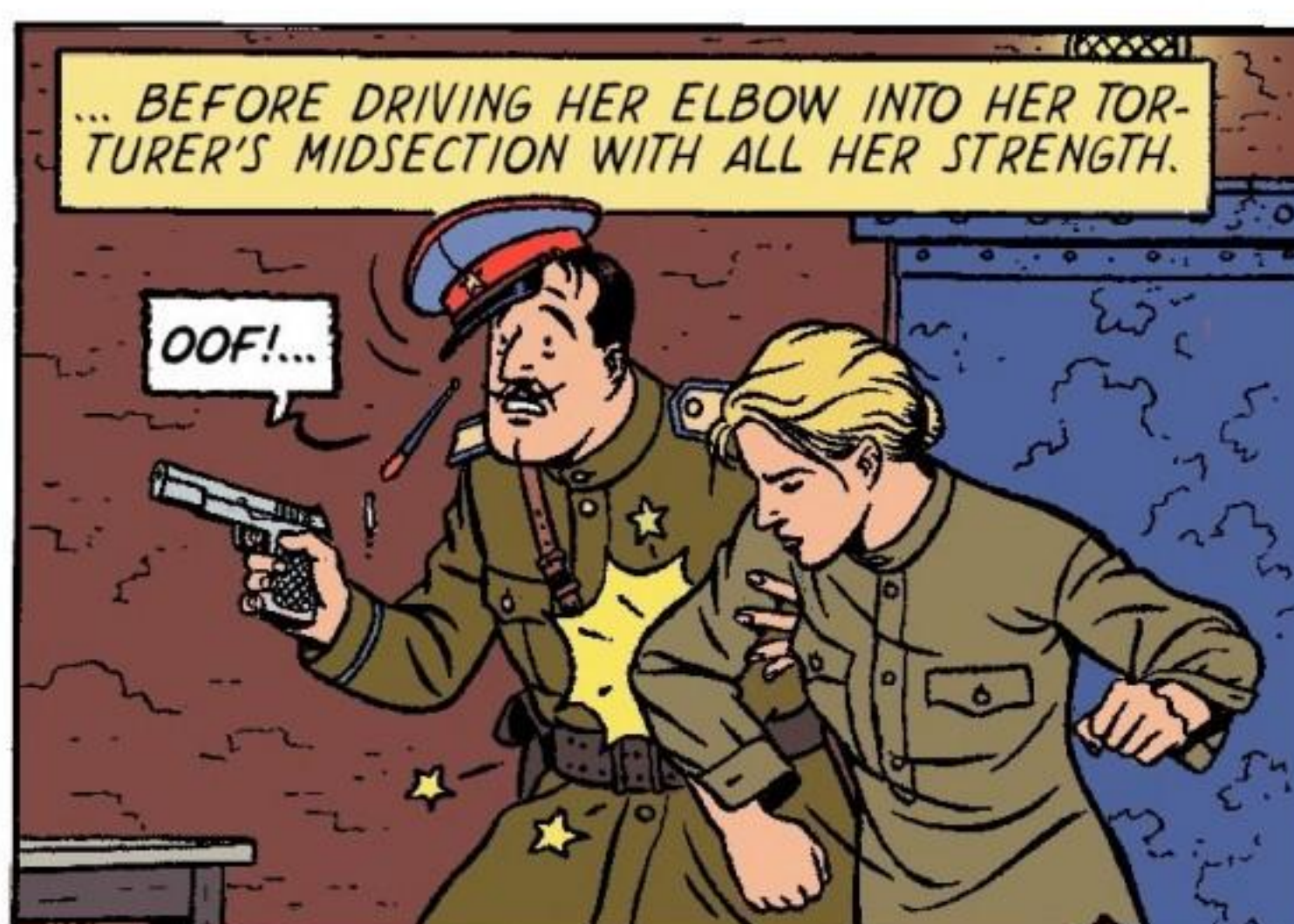
Welcome to the Lubyanka, Captain! Isn't the good General Orloff going to be chuffed when I bring you to him, all trussed up—the head of M15 himself! Ha! Ha! Ha!



*KGB FOREIGN OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

DOWN IN THE BASEMENT, THE GUARD USHERS THE VISITOR INTO A GLOOMY CELL...





IN DESPERATION, THEY ARE ABOUT TO SEIZE THE MILITARY VEHICLE PARKED IN FRONT OF THE LUBYANKA WHEN THE POWERFUL ROAR OF AN ENGINE REACHES THEM...



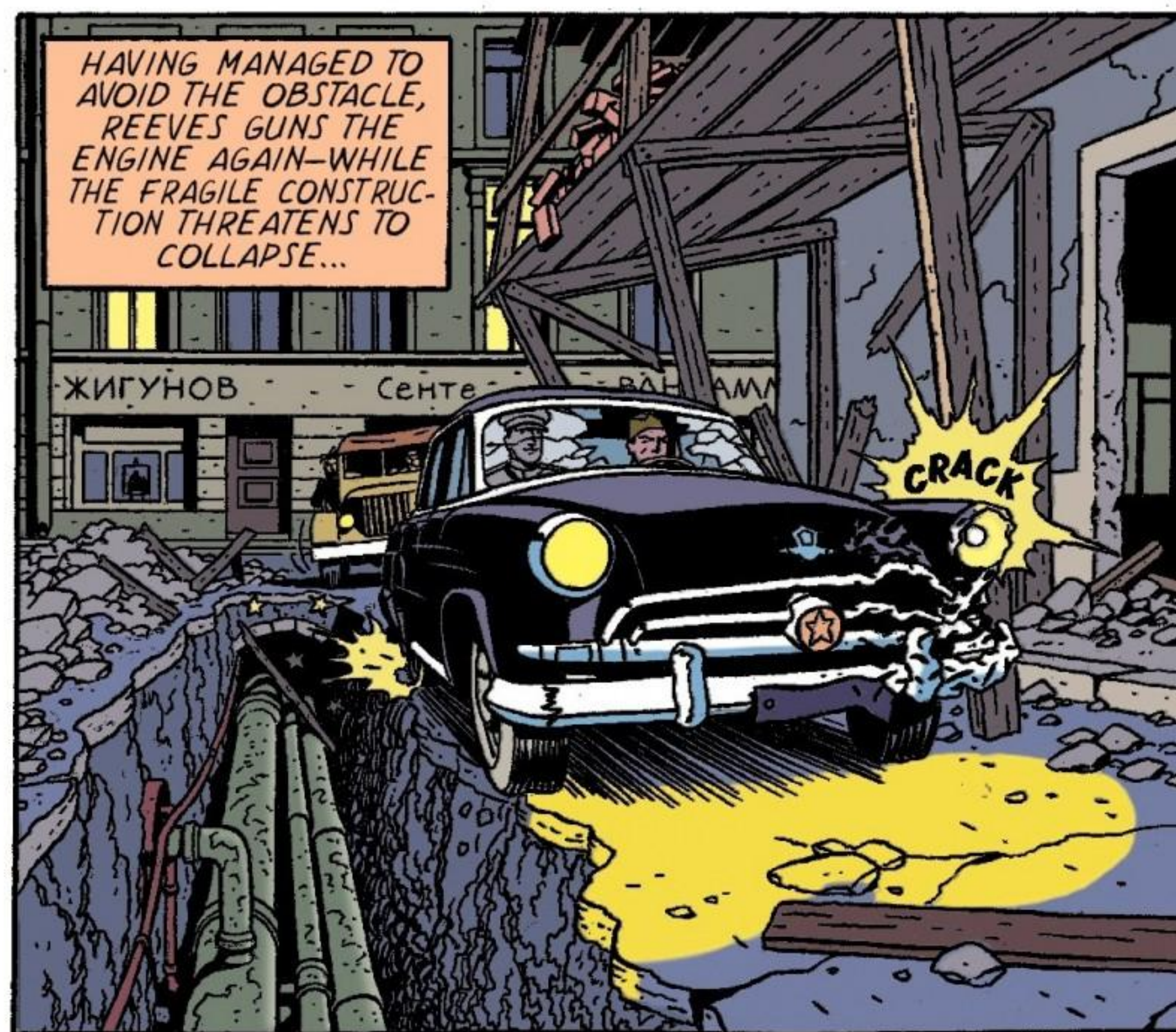
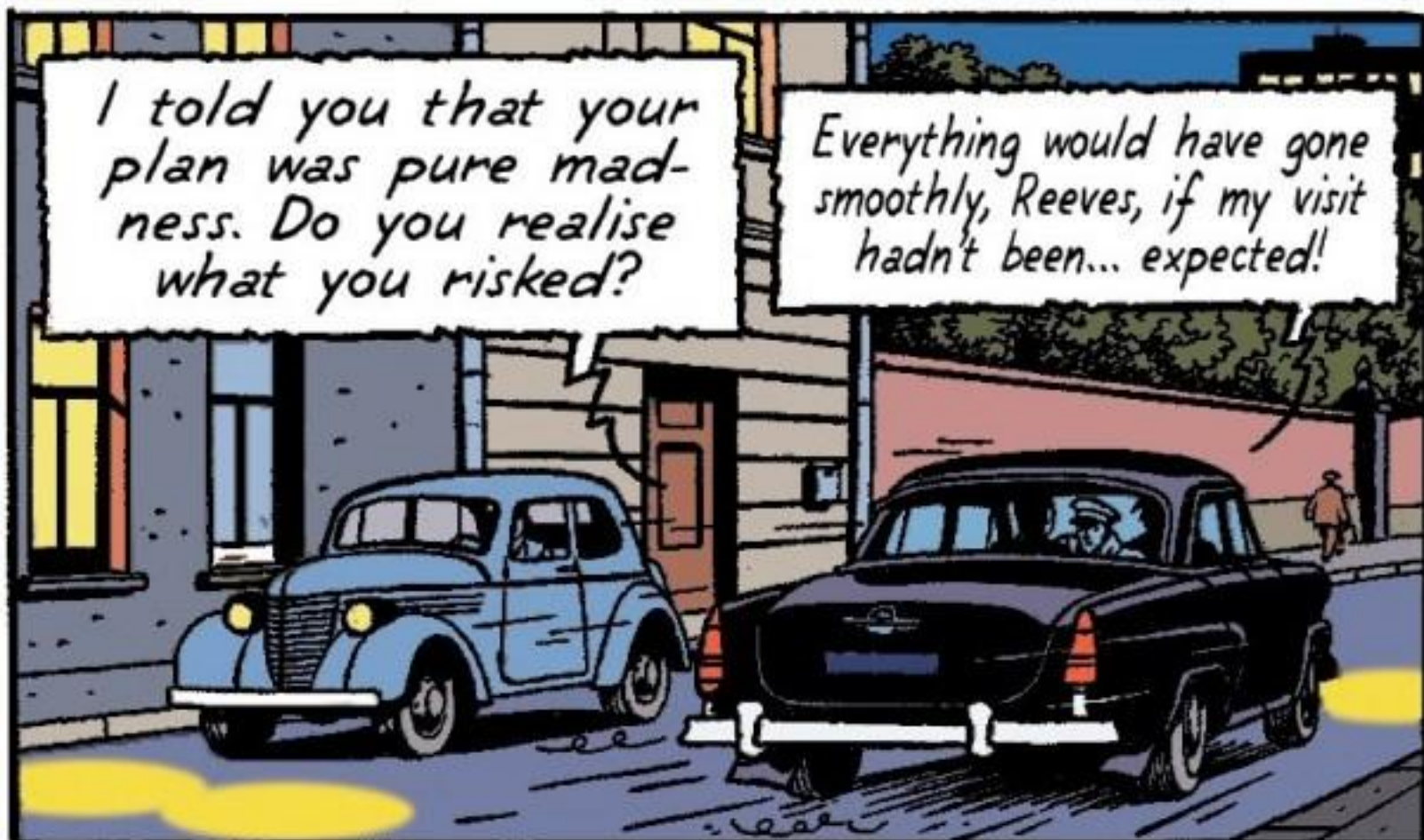
HAVING RECOGNISED REEVES, BLAKE—FOLLOWED BY NASTASIA—DASHES TOWARDS THE CAR AS IT STOPS BEFORE THEM IN A SCREECH OF TIRES.



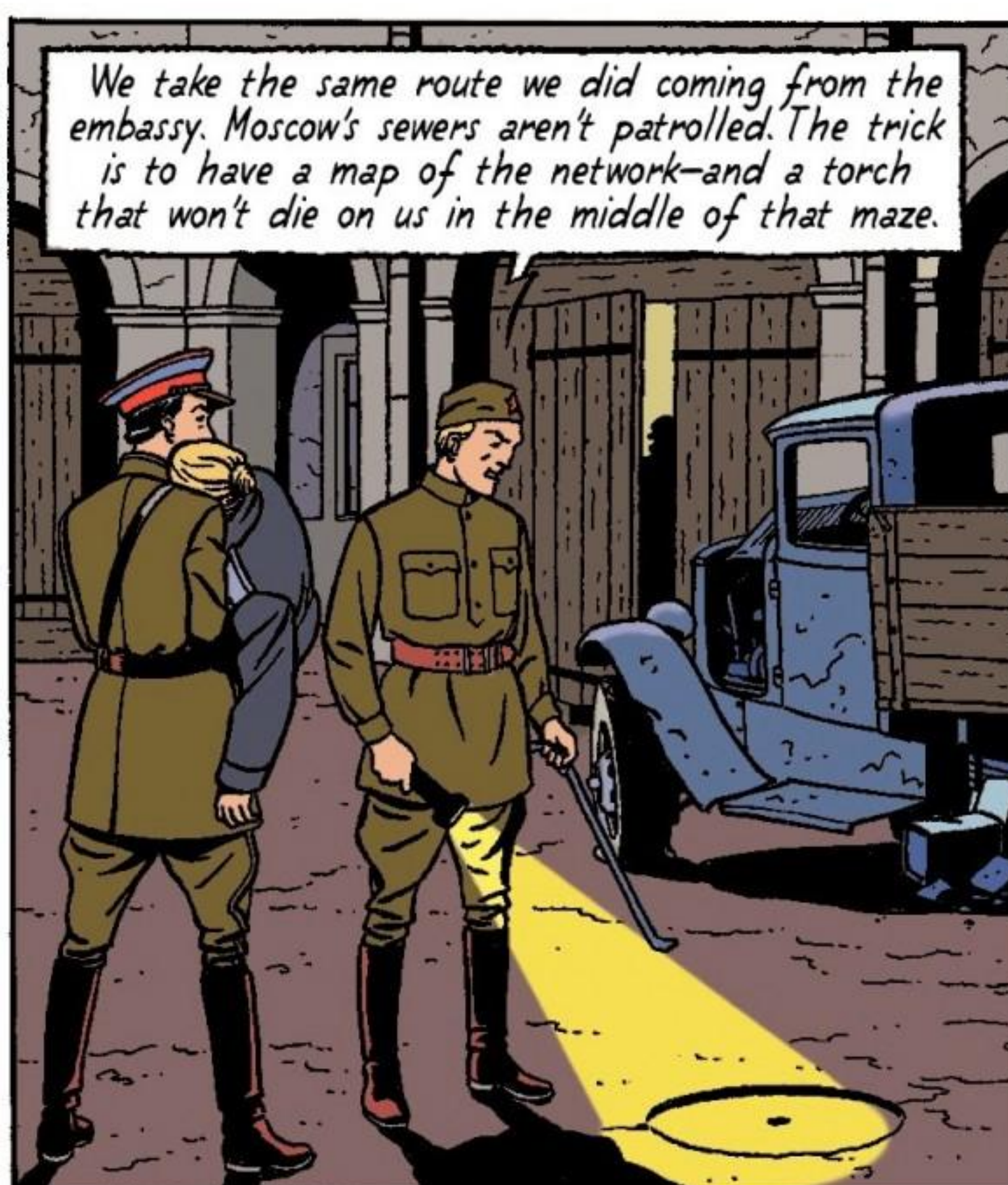
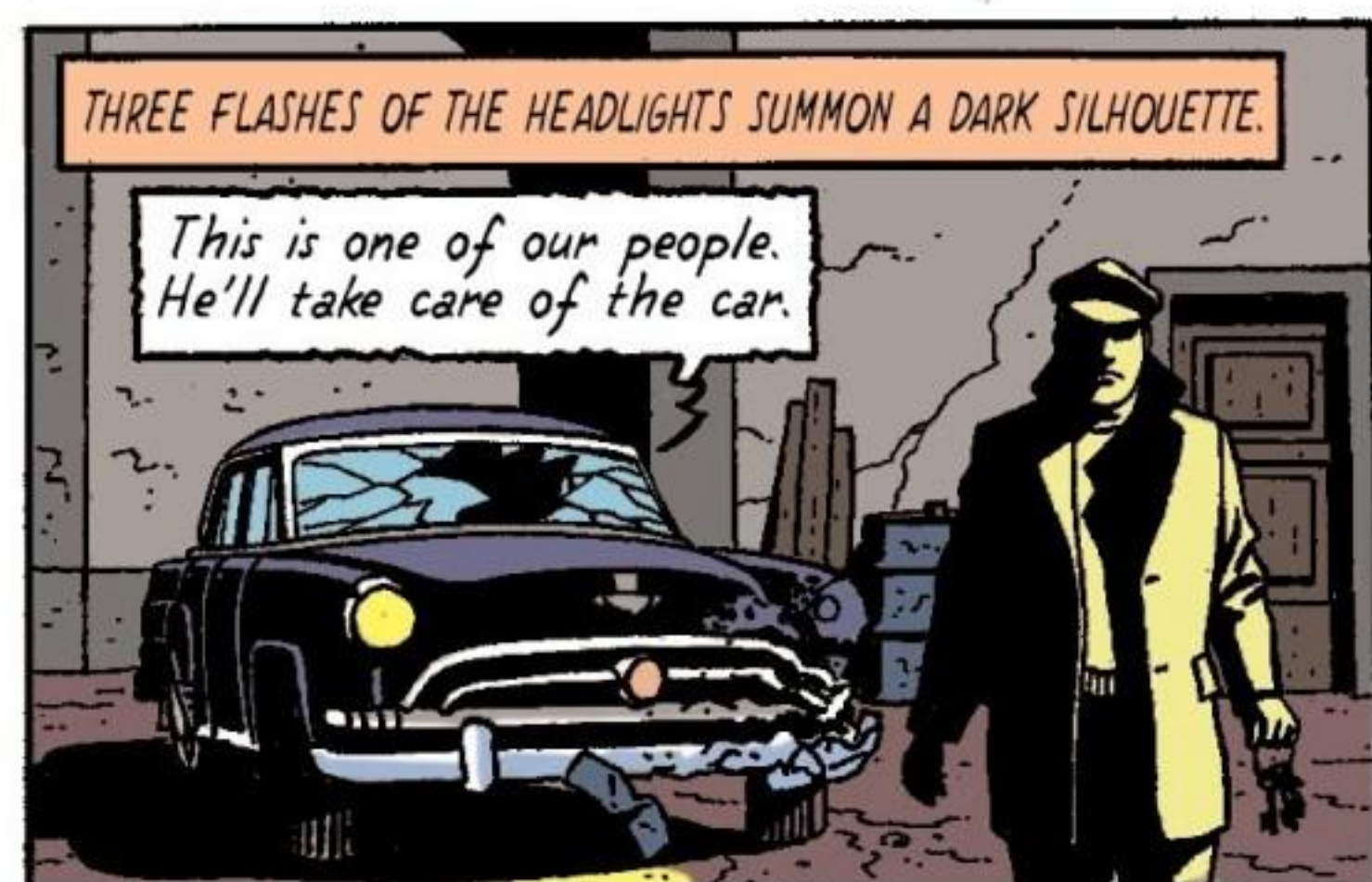
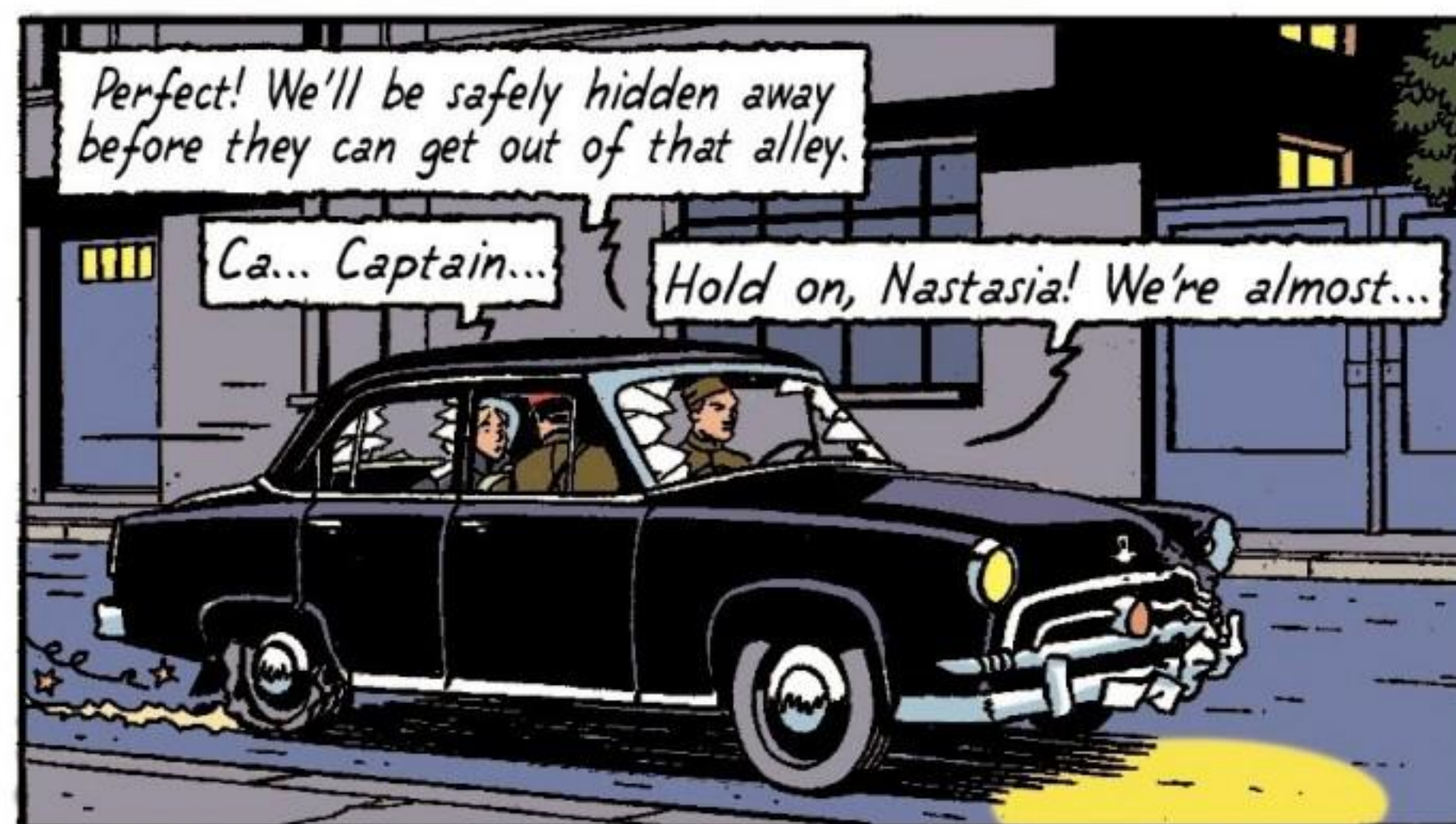
AT THAT EXACT MOMENT, A RAGING OLRİK APPEARS.



WHILE REEVES SPEEDS OFF WITH HIS TWO PASSENGERS, UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM THE TWO GUARDS, OLRİK RUSHES TOWARDS THE SOLDIER GUARDING THE PARKED MILITARY VEHICLE...



JUST AS HE CAN ONCE AGAIN ADJUST HIS AIM FOLLOWING HIS VEHICLE'S TIGHT TURN, OLRİK REALISES WITH HORROR THAT THE SCAFFOLDING IS COLLAPSING!

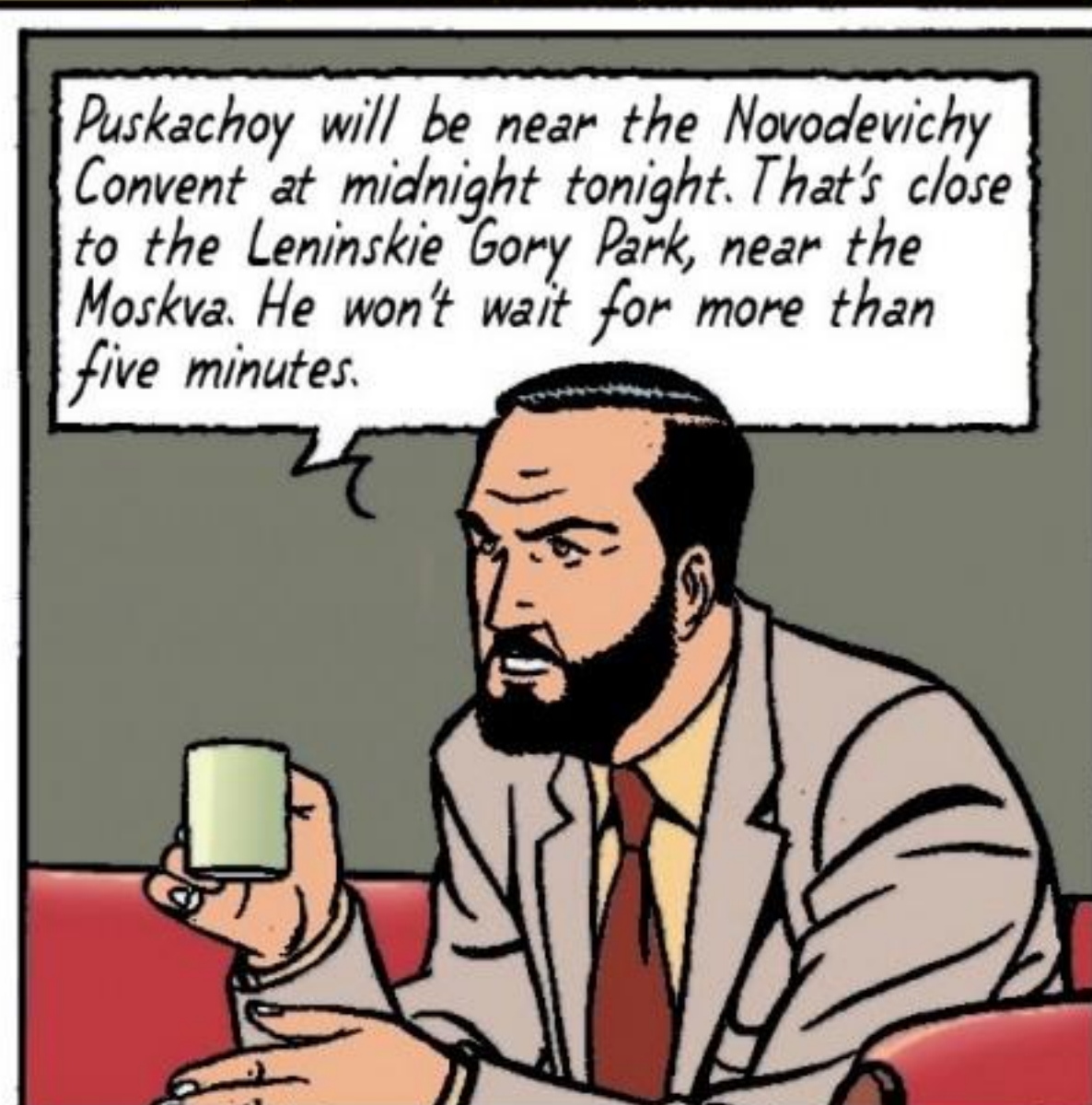


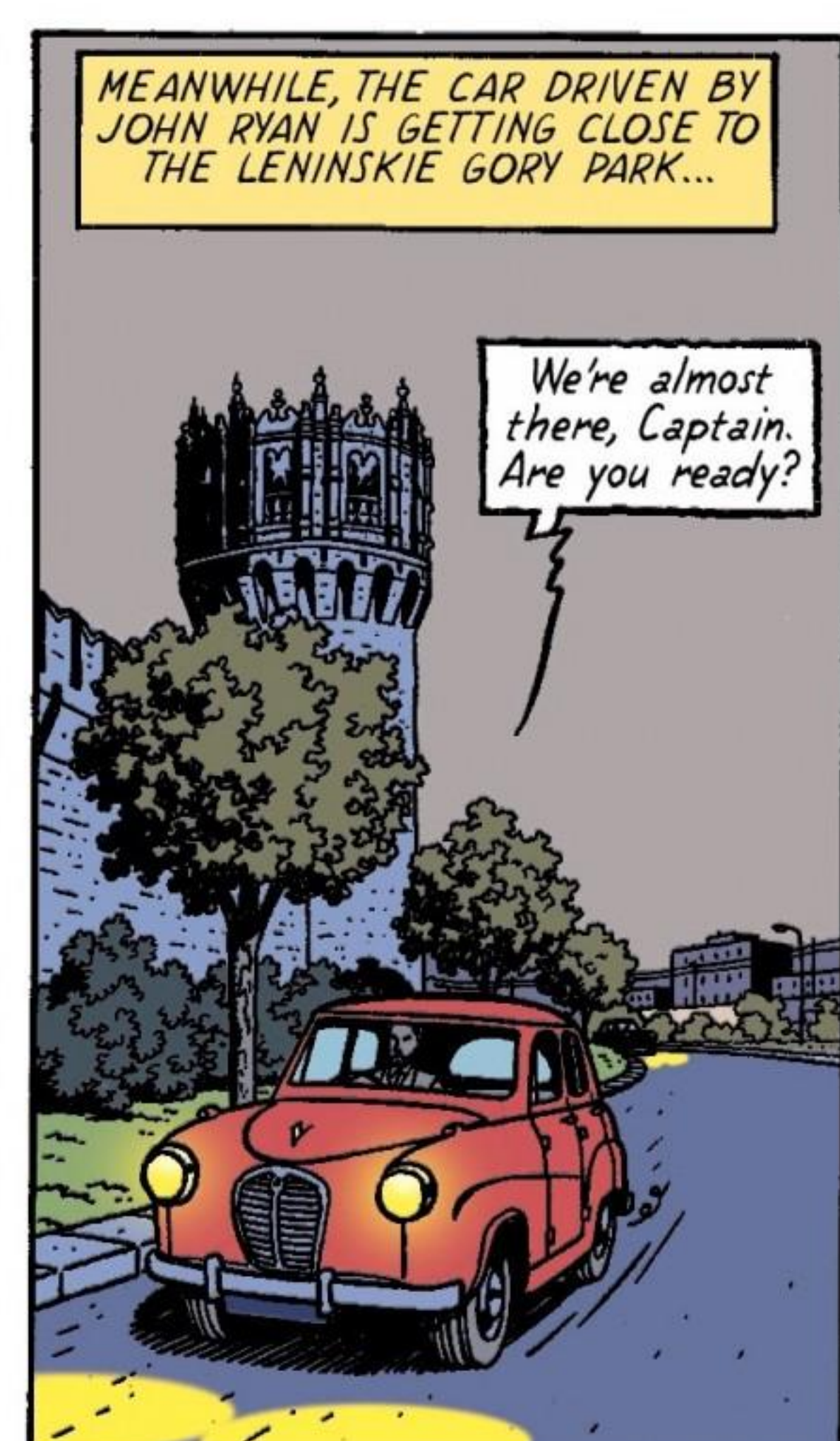
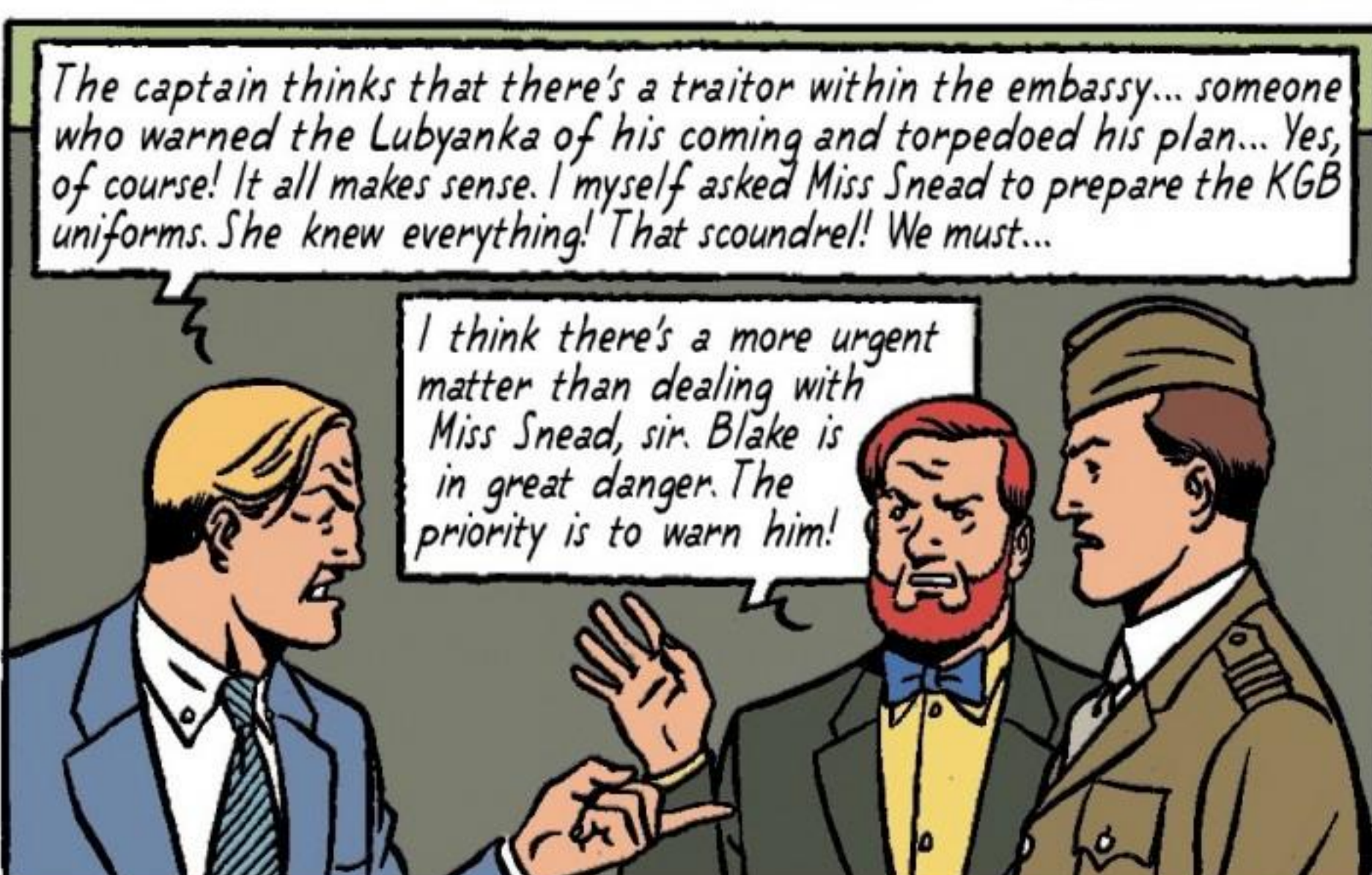
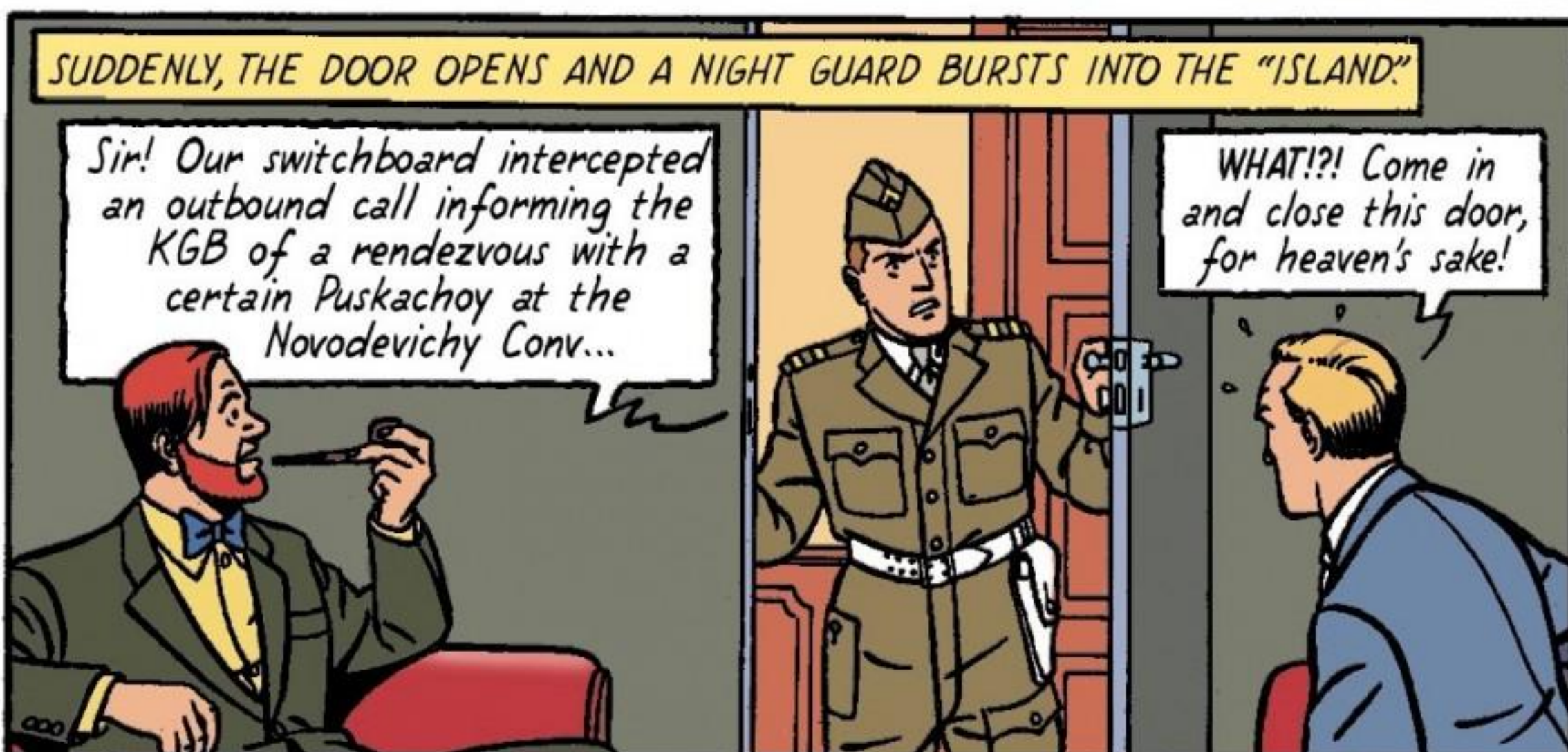
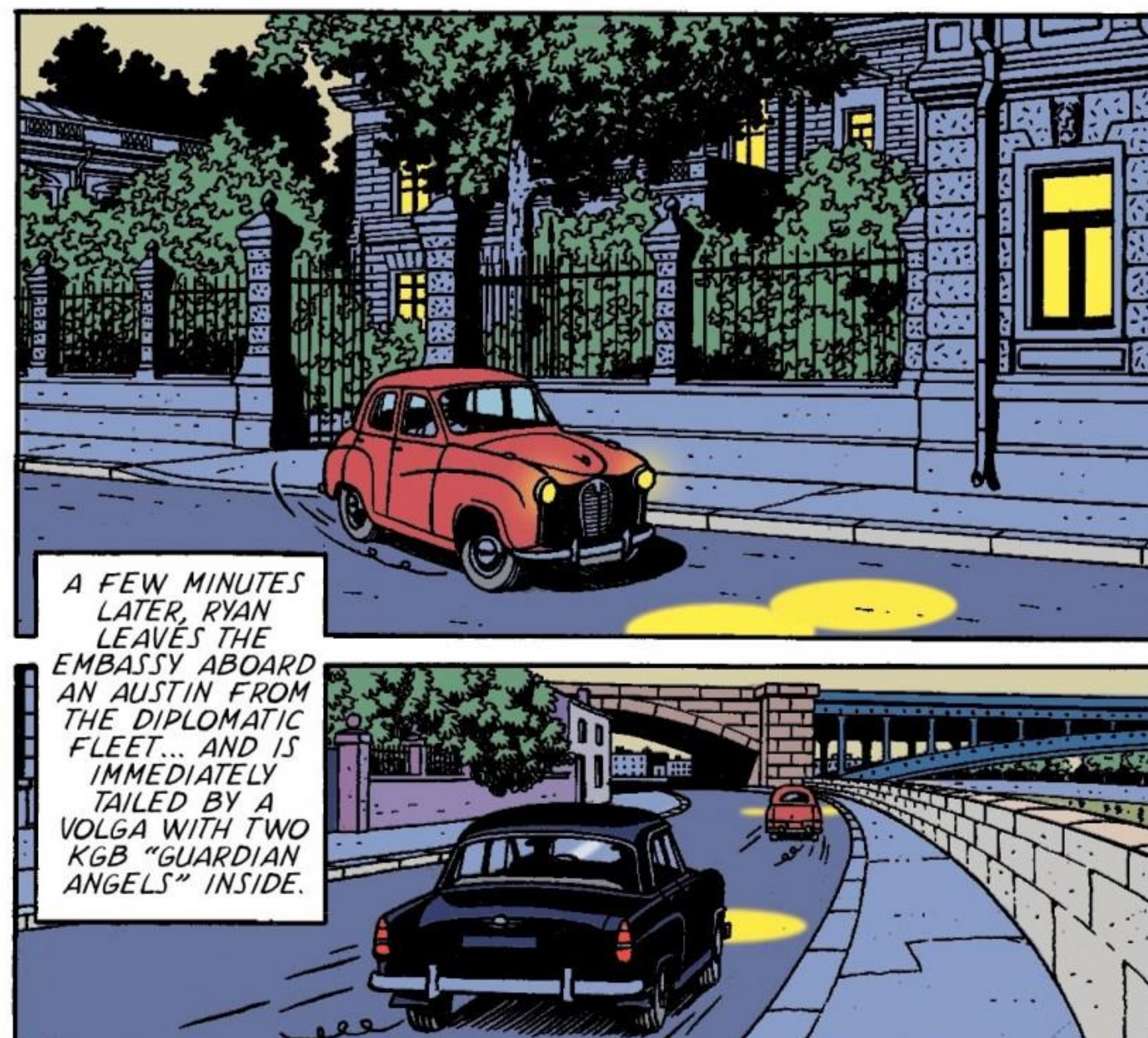
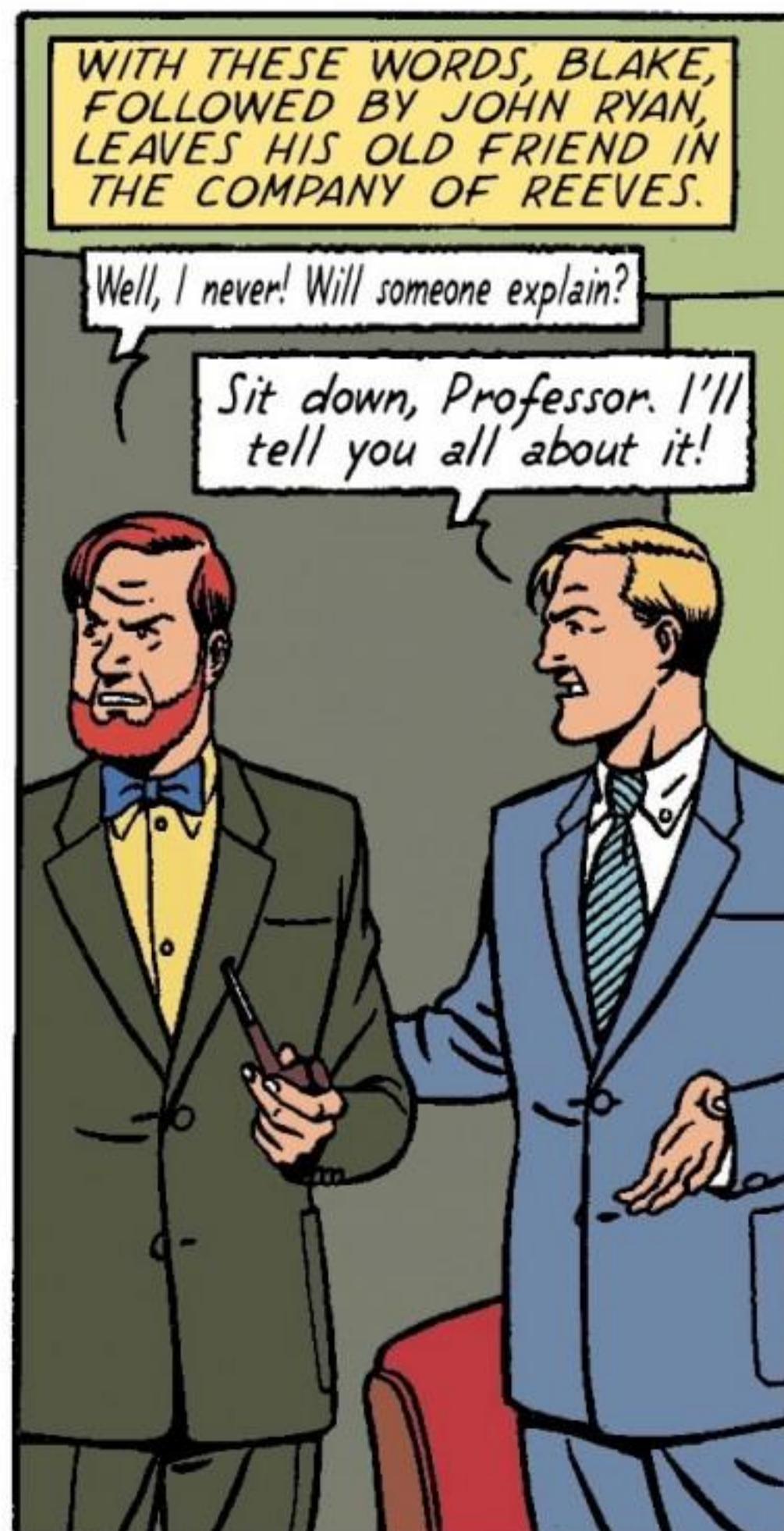
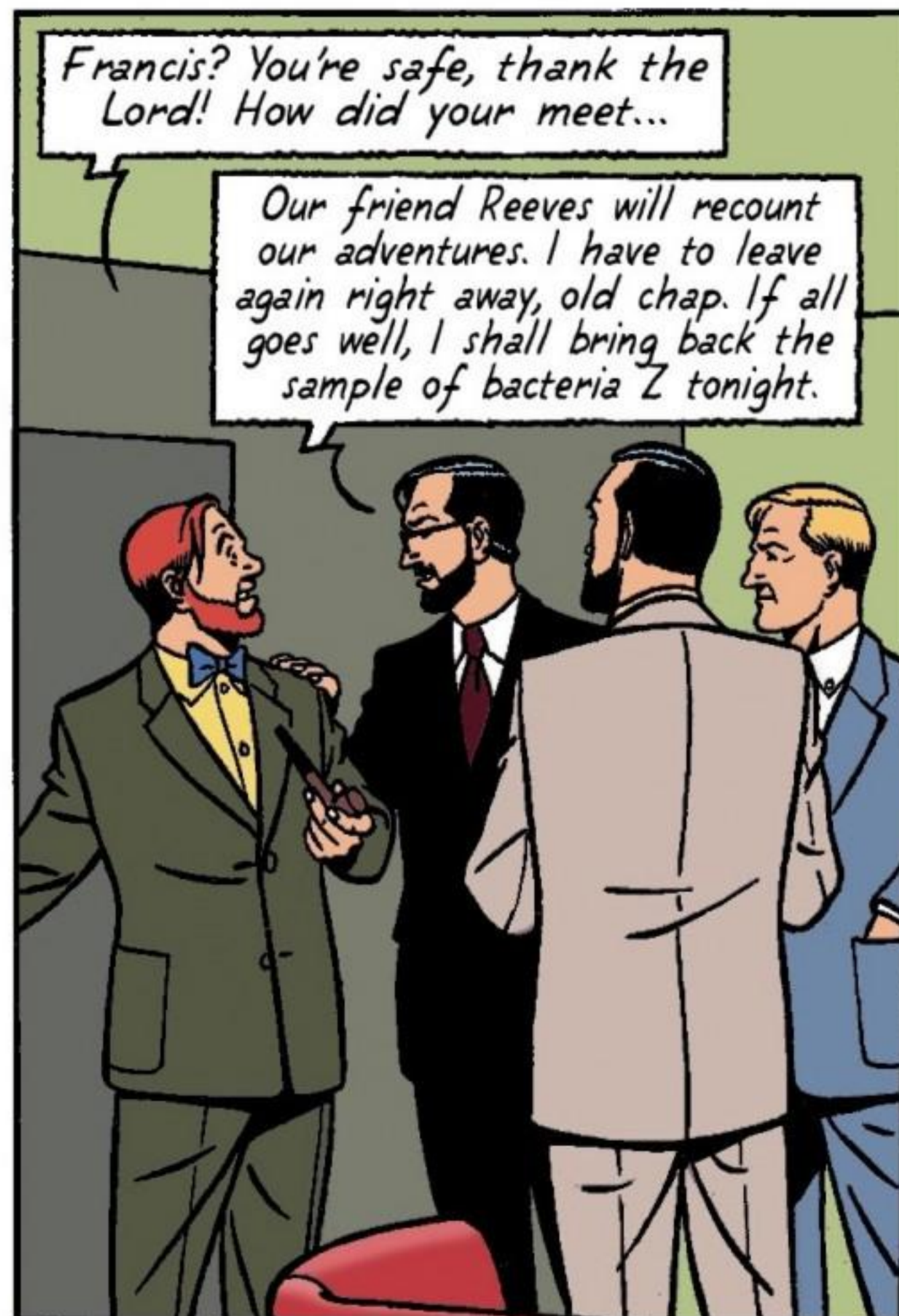
QUICKLY, THE TWO MEN HAVE LOWERED THE UNCONSCIOUS YOUNG WOMAN INTO THE FOUL-SMELLING LABYRINTH THAT WILL TAKE THEM—DISCREETLY—TO THE BRITISH EMBASSY.

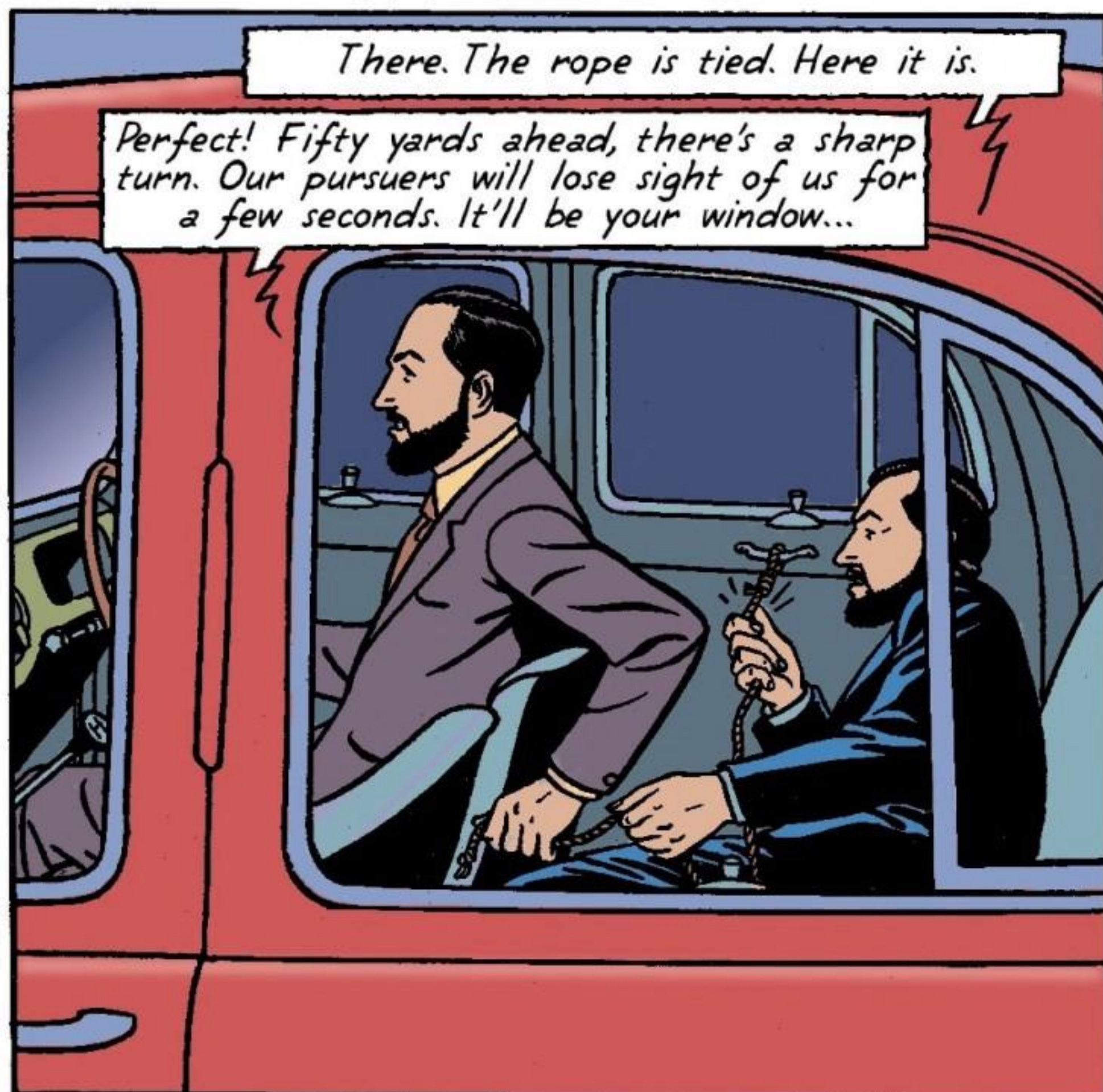




ONCE THE SECRETARY HAS CLOSED THE DOOR AFTER HERSELF, REEVES INVITES RYAN TO GO ON.







There. The rope is tied. Here it is.

Perfect! Fifty yards ahead, there's a sharp turn. Our pursuers will lose sight of us for a few seconds. It'll be your window...

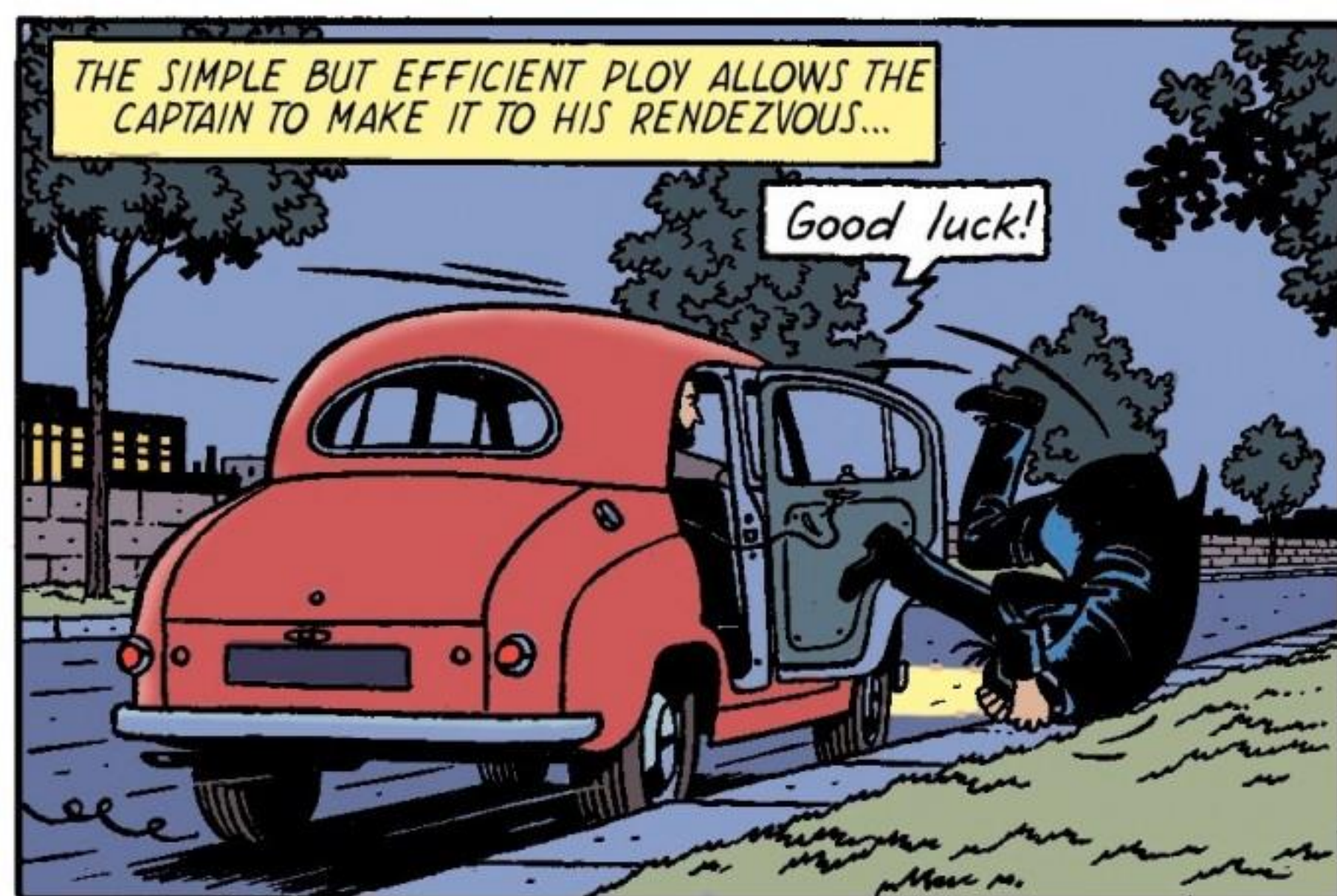


I wonder where he can be going at this hour!

Drive faster! You're going to lose him!



I can't see their headlights anymore. Now!



THE SIMPLE BUT EFFICIENT PLOY ALLOWS THE CAPTAIN TO MAKE IT TO HIS RENDEZVOUS...

Good luck!



INSTEAD, RYAN DRIVES ON, TRAILED BY THE UNSUSPECTING OCCUPANTS OF THE BLACK VOLGA.

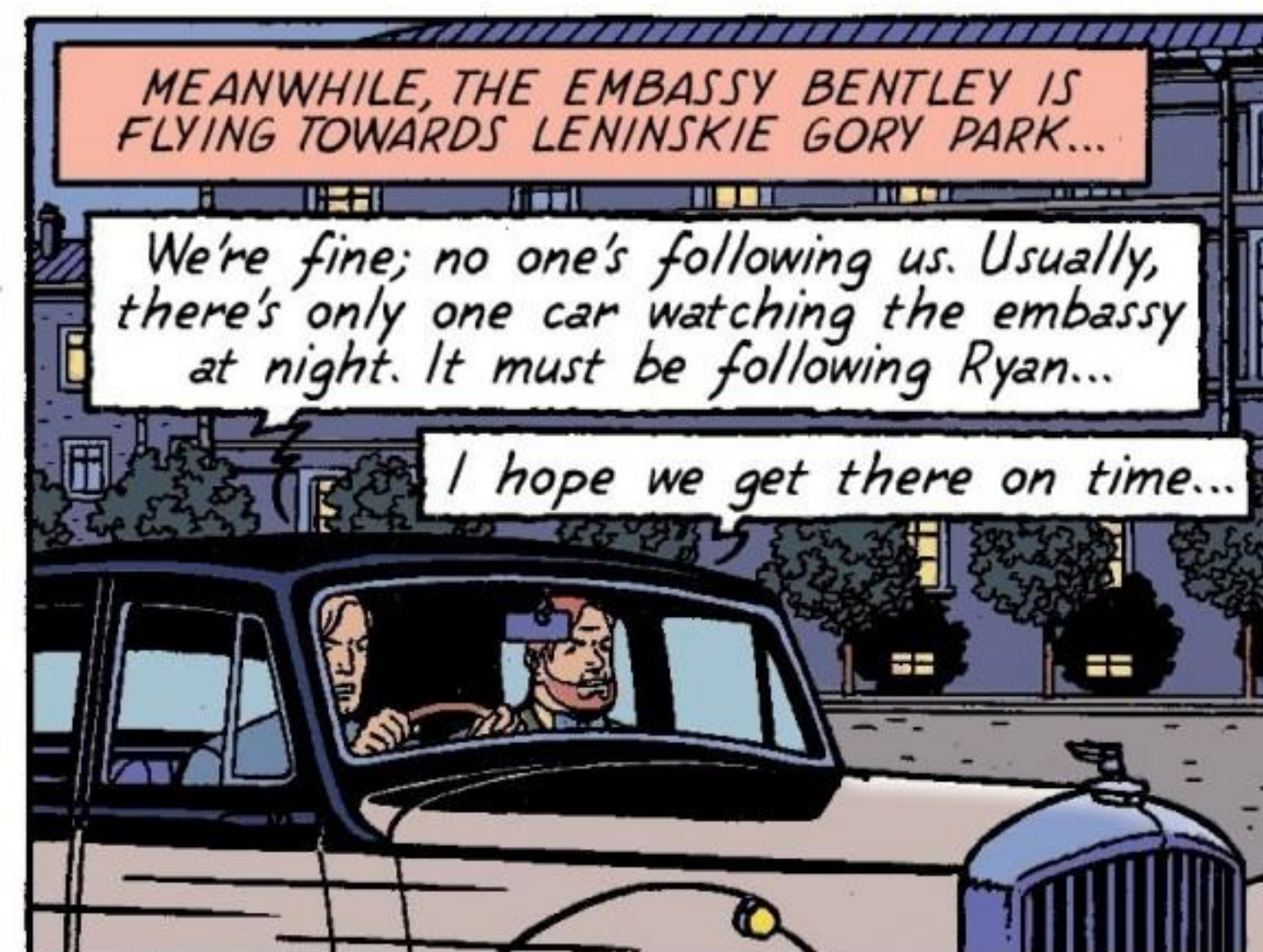


Well, I may be getting too old for all this! But everything's gone well so far. Puskachoy shouldn't be long now.



CLAP

... WITHOUT BEING FOLLOWED AND... WITHOUT PUTTING HIS DRIVER IN HARM'S WAY.



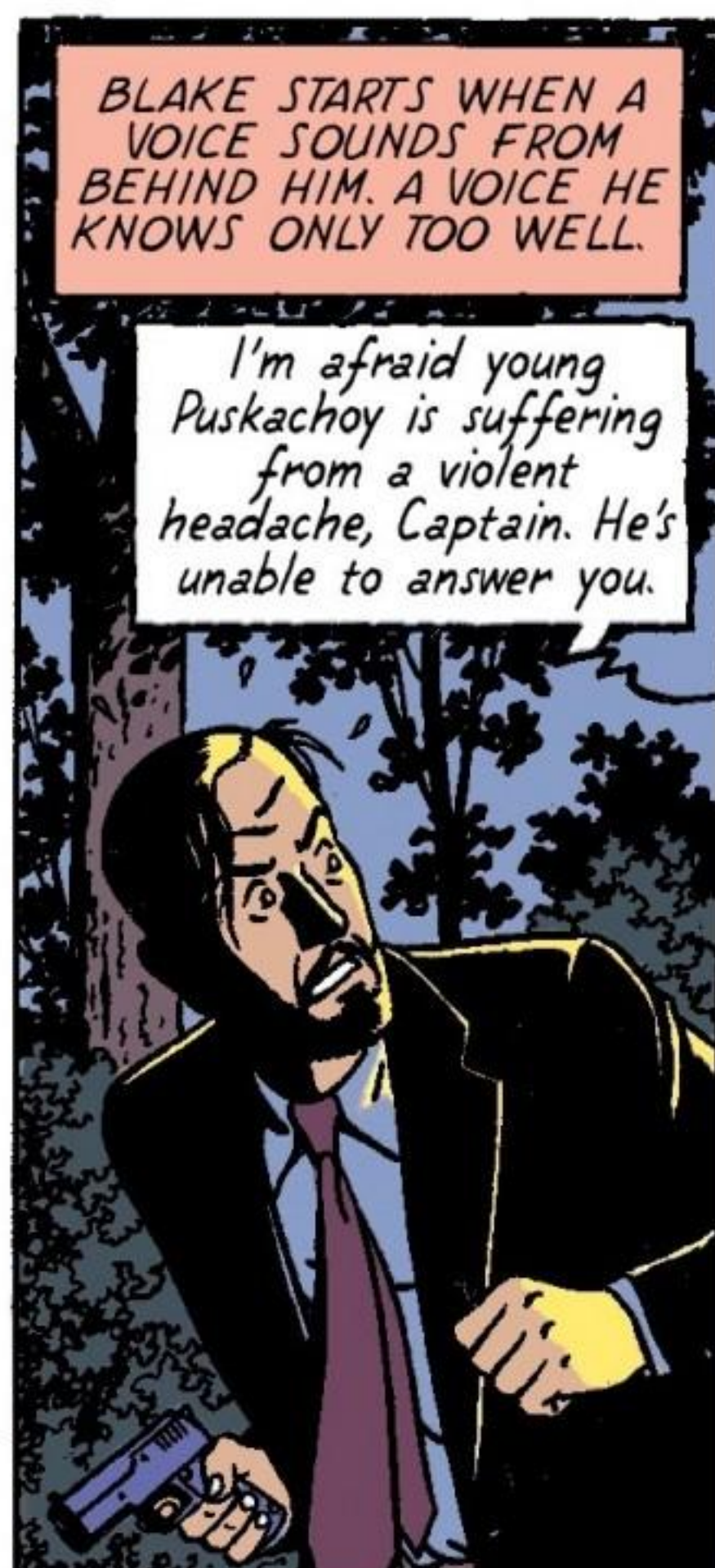
MEANWHILE, THE EMBASSY BENTLEY IS FLYING TOWARDS LENINSKIE GORY PARK...

We're fine; no one's following us. Usually, there's only one car watching the embassy at night. It must be following Ryan...

I hope we get there on time...



Puskachoy? Are you there? I've been sent by MOS ONE to retrieve the doll...



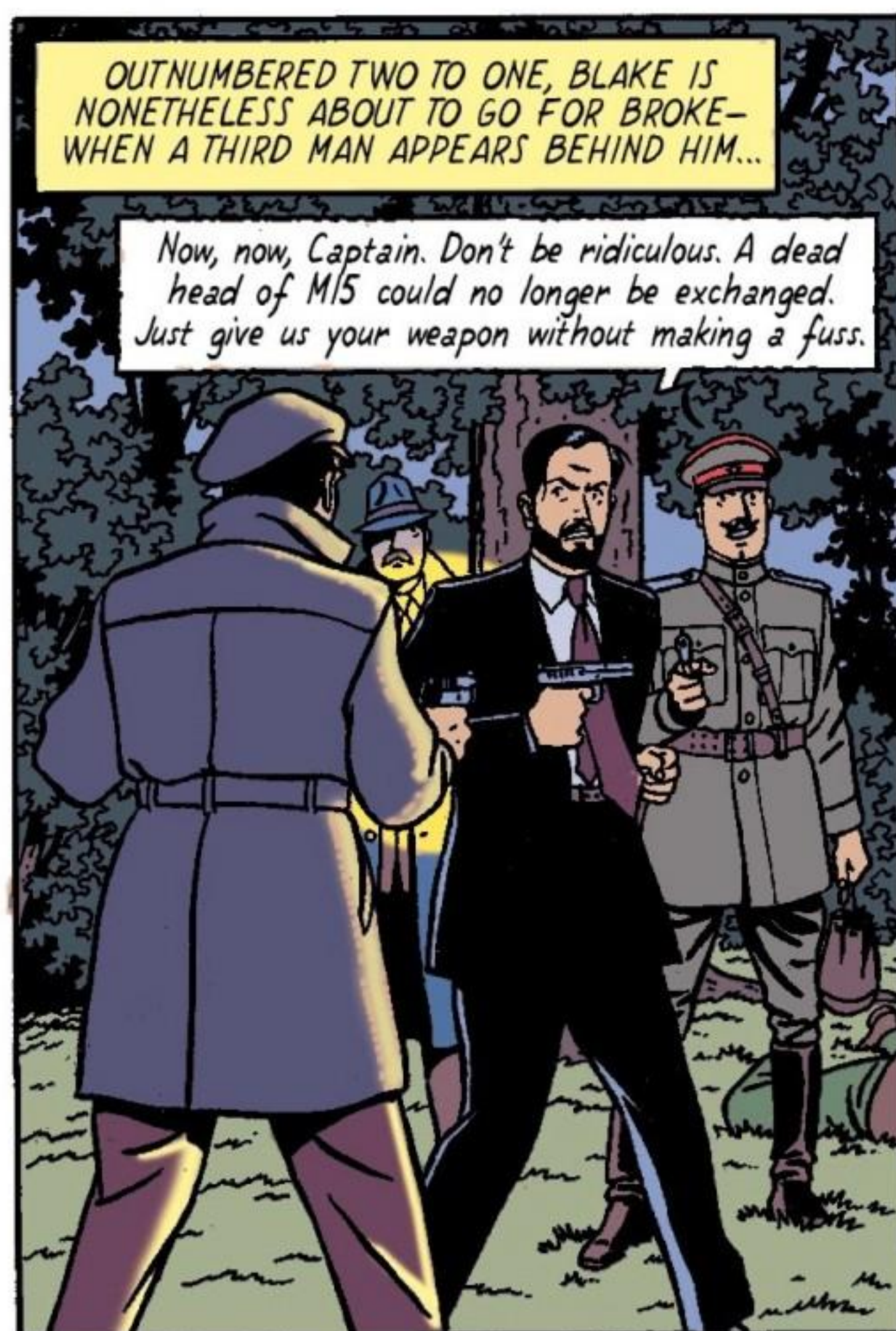
BLAKE STARTS WHEN A VOICE SOUNDS FROM BEHIND HIM. A VOICE HE KNOWS ONLY TOO WELL.

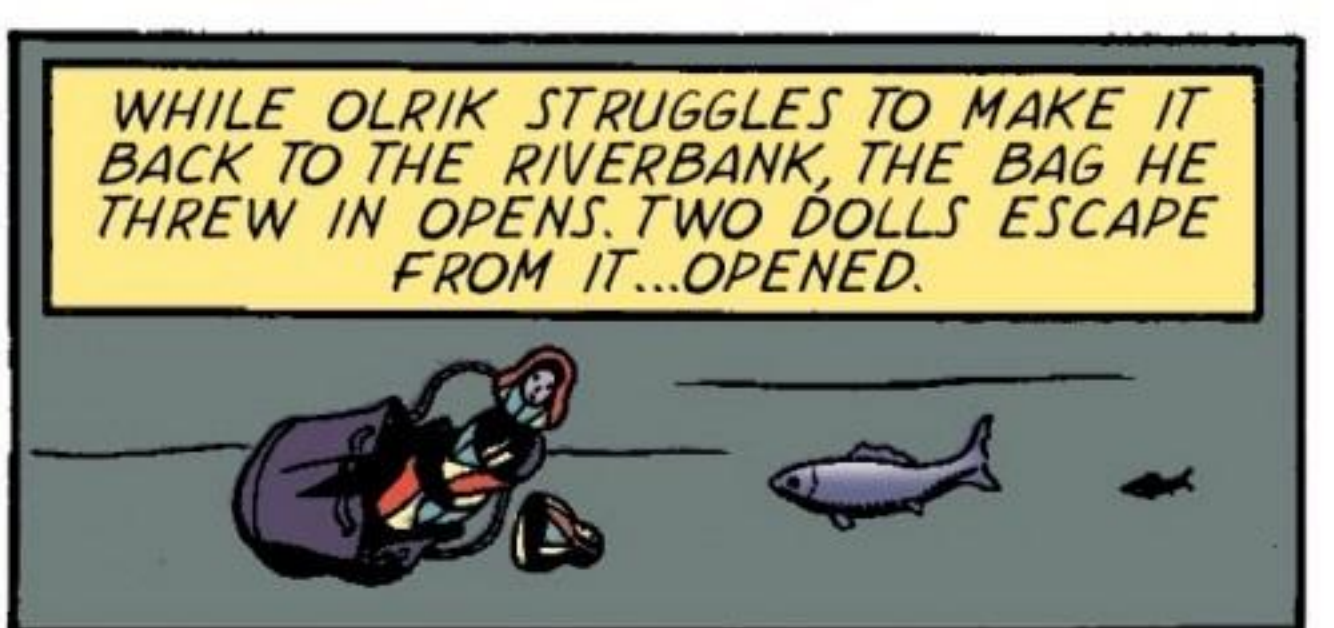
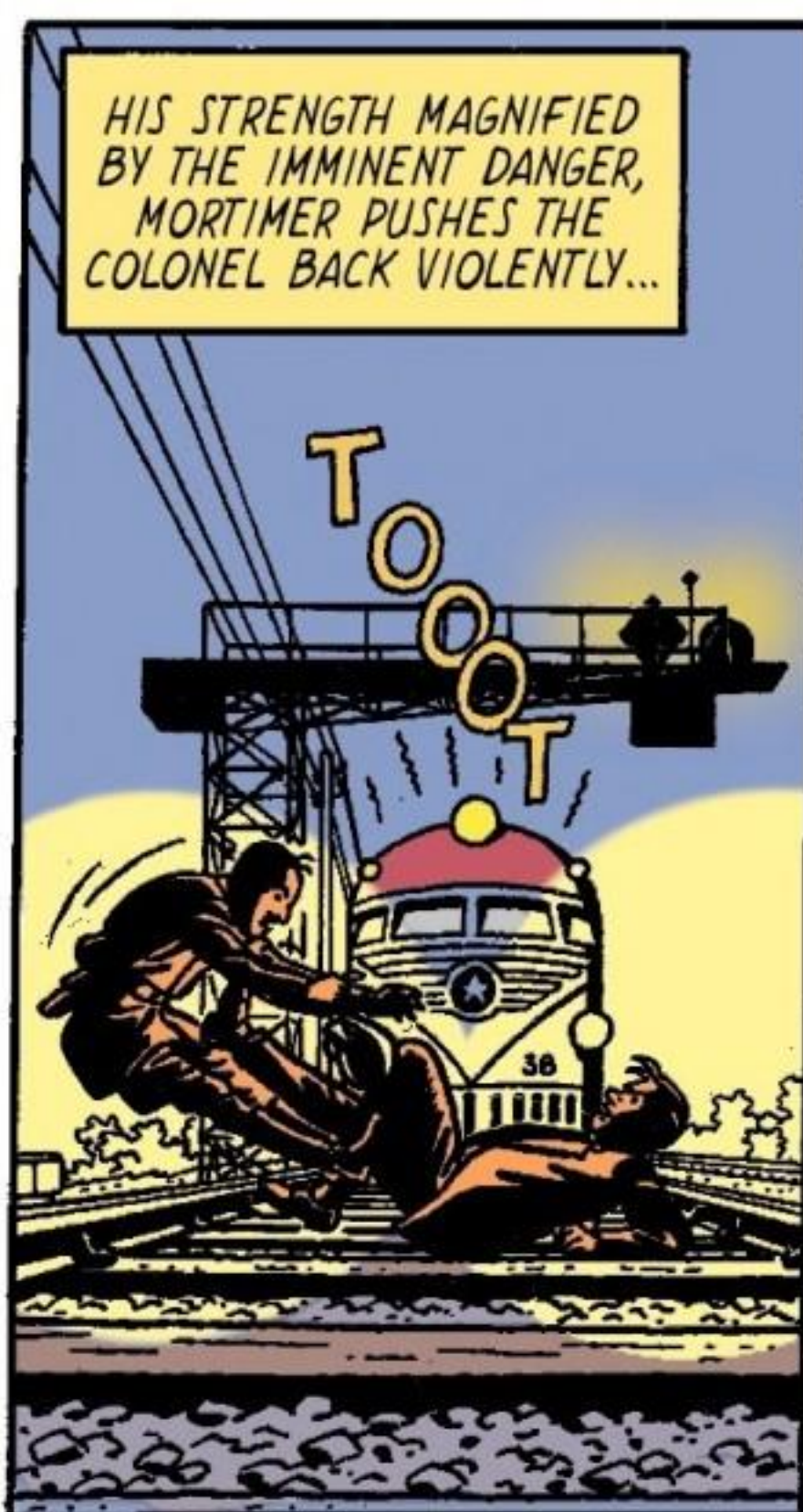
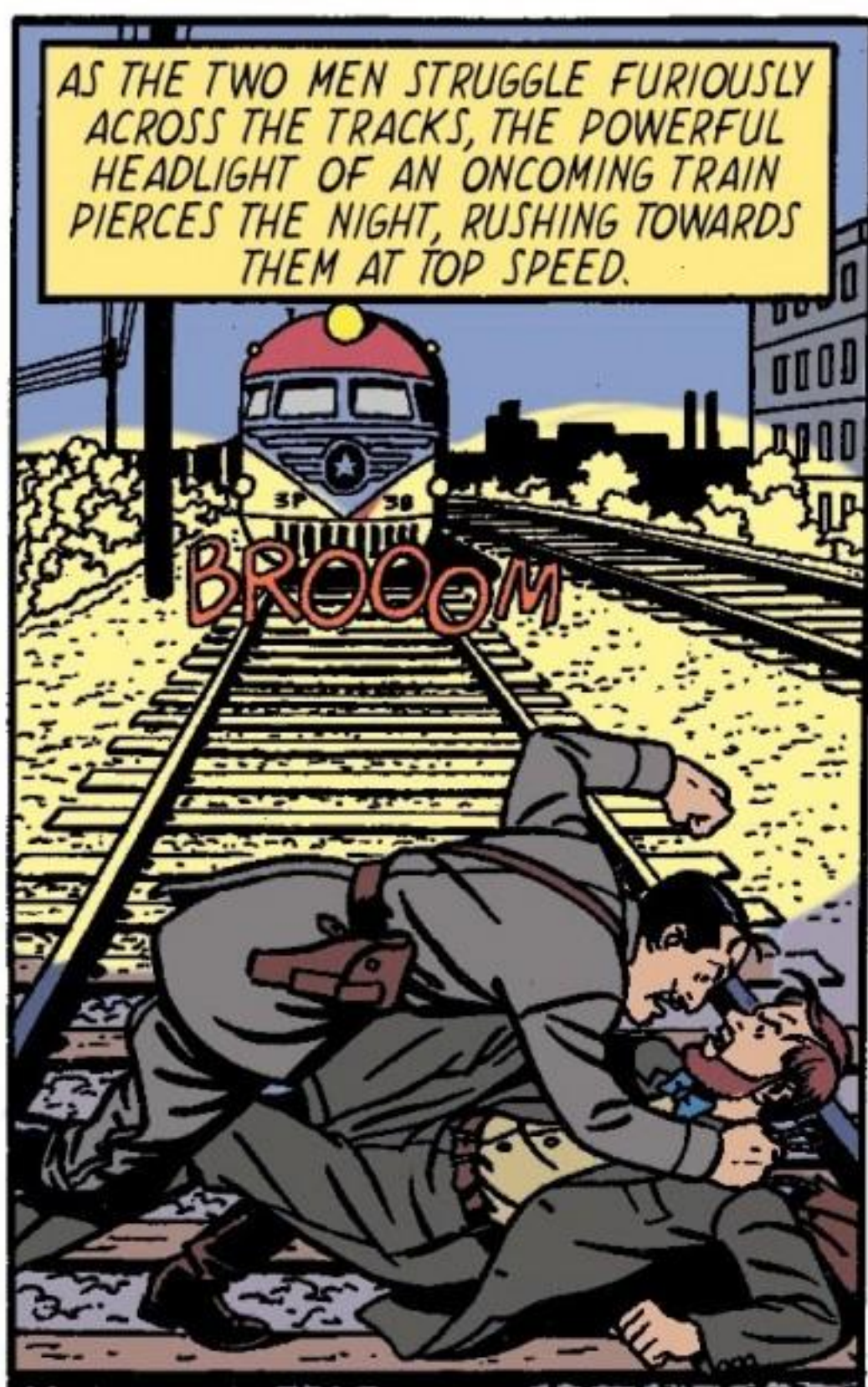
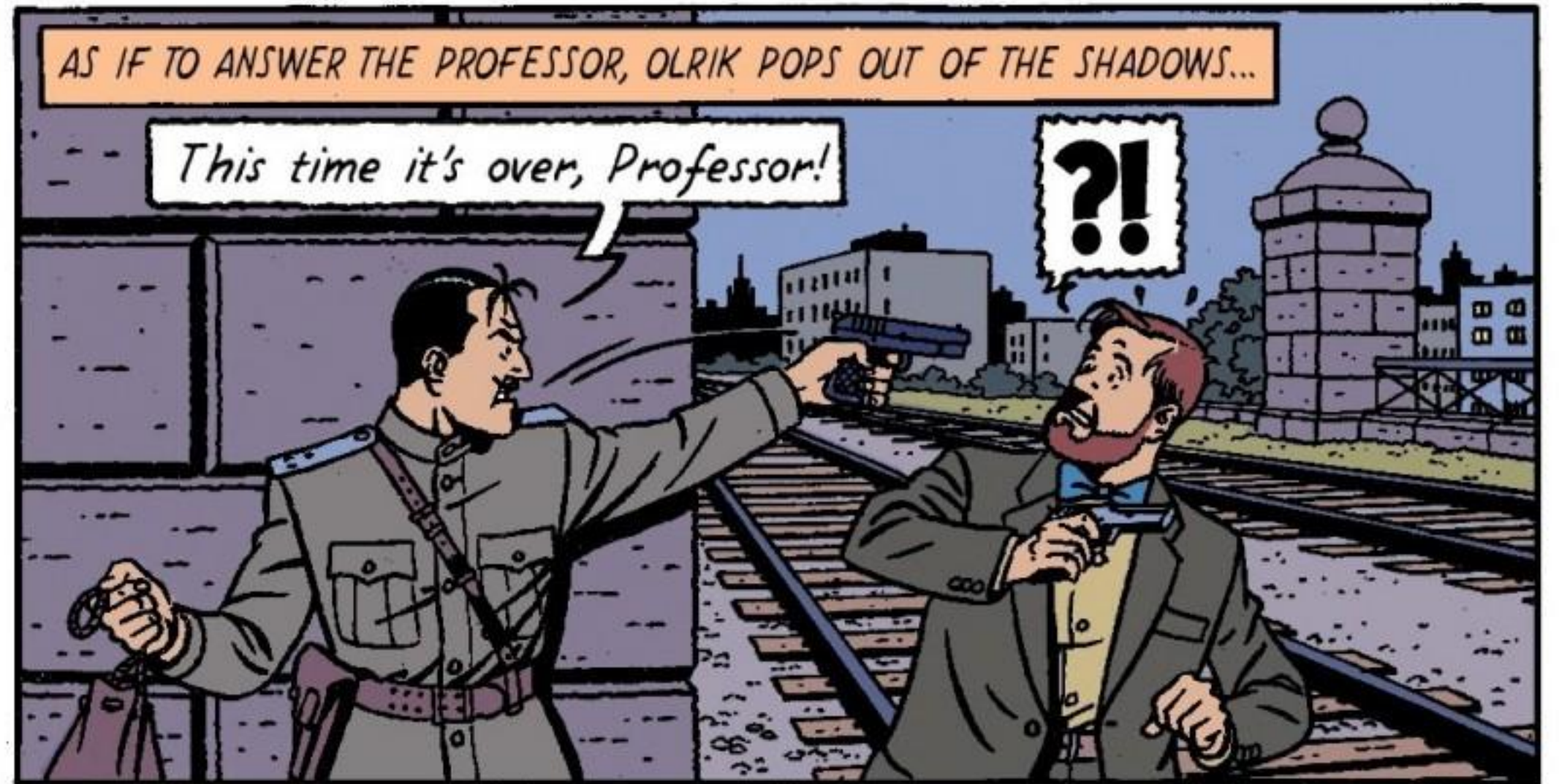
I'm afraid young Puskachoy is suffering from a violent headache, Captain. He's unable to answer you.

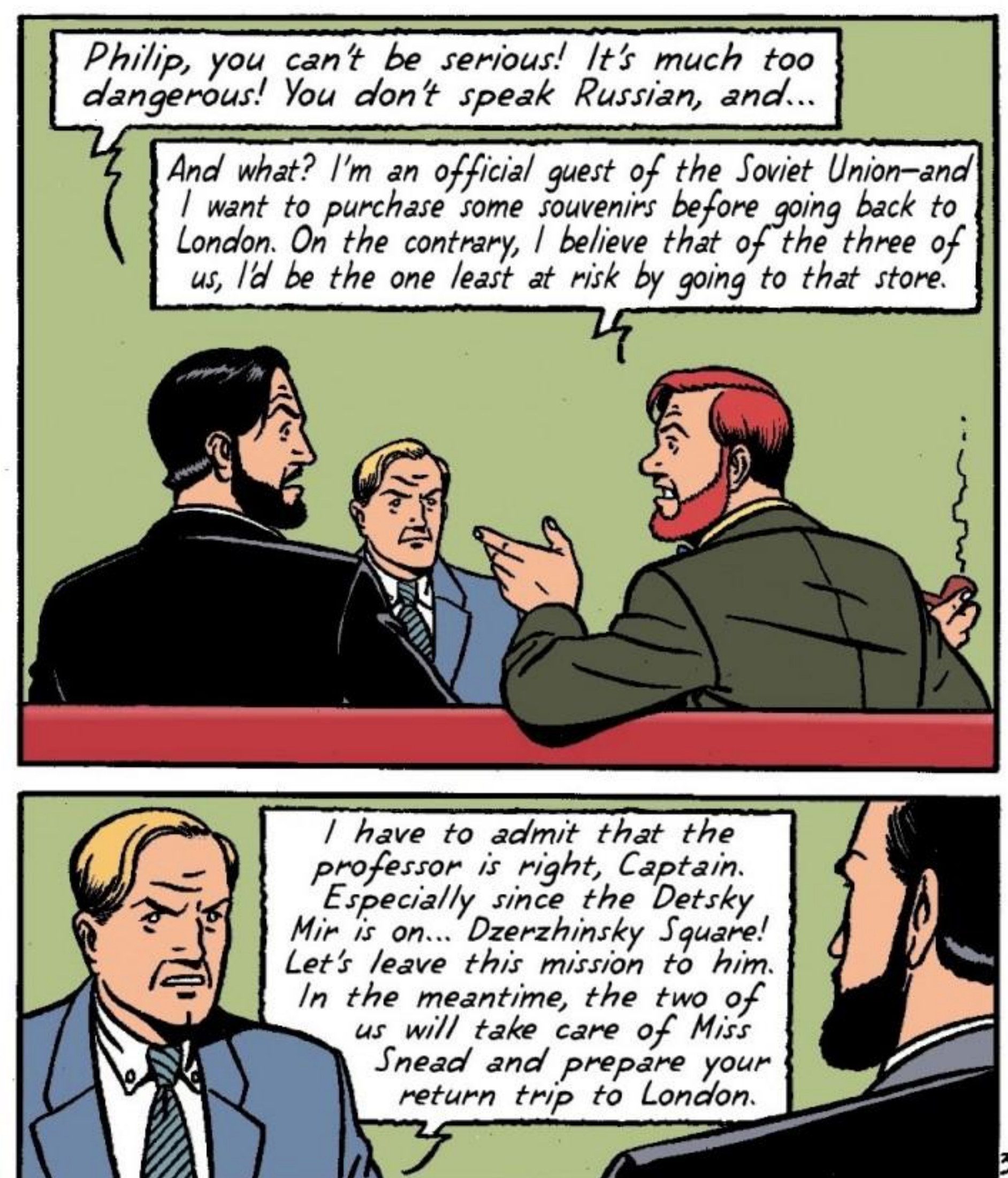
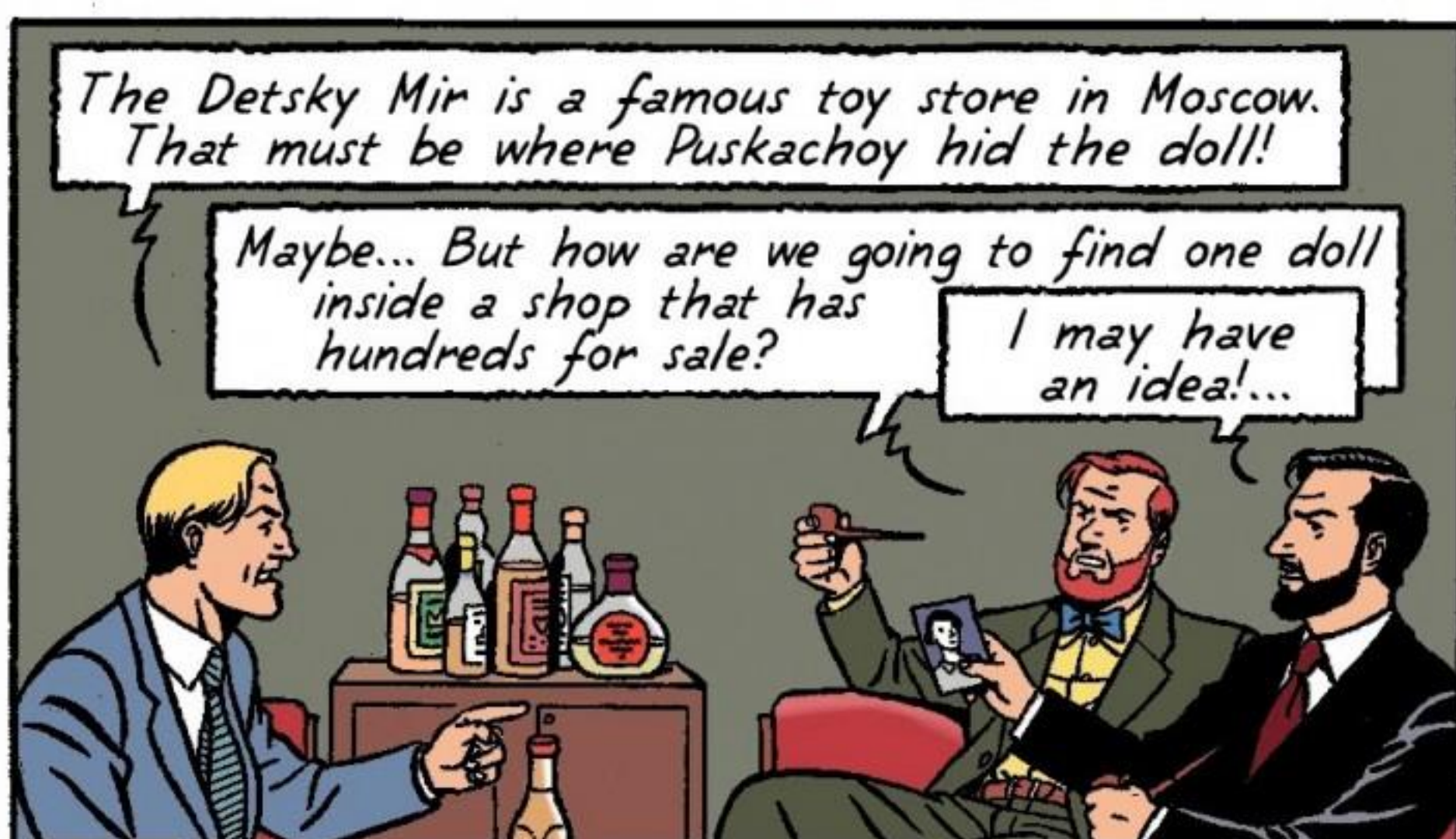
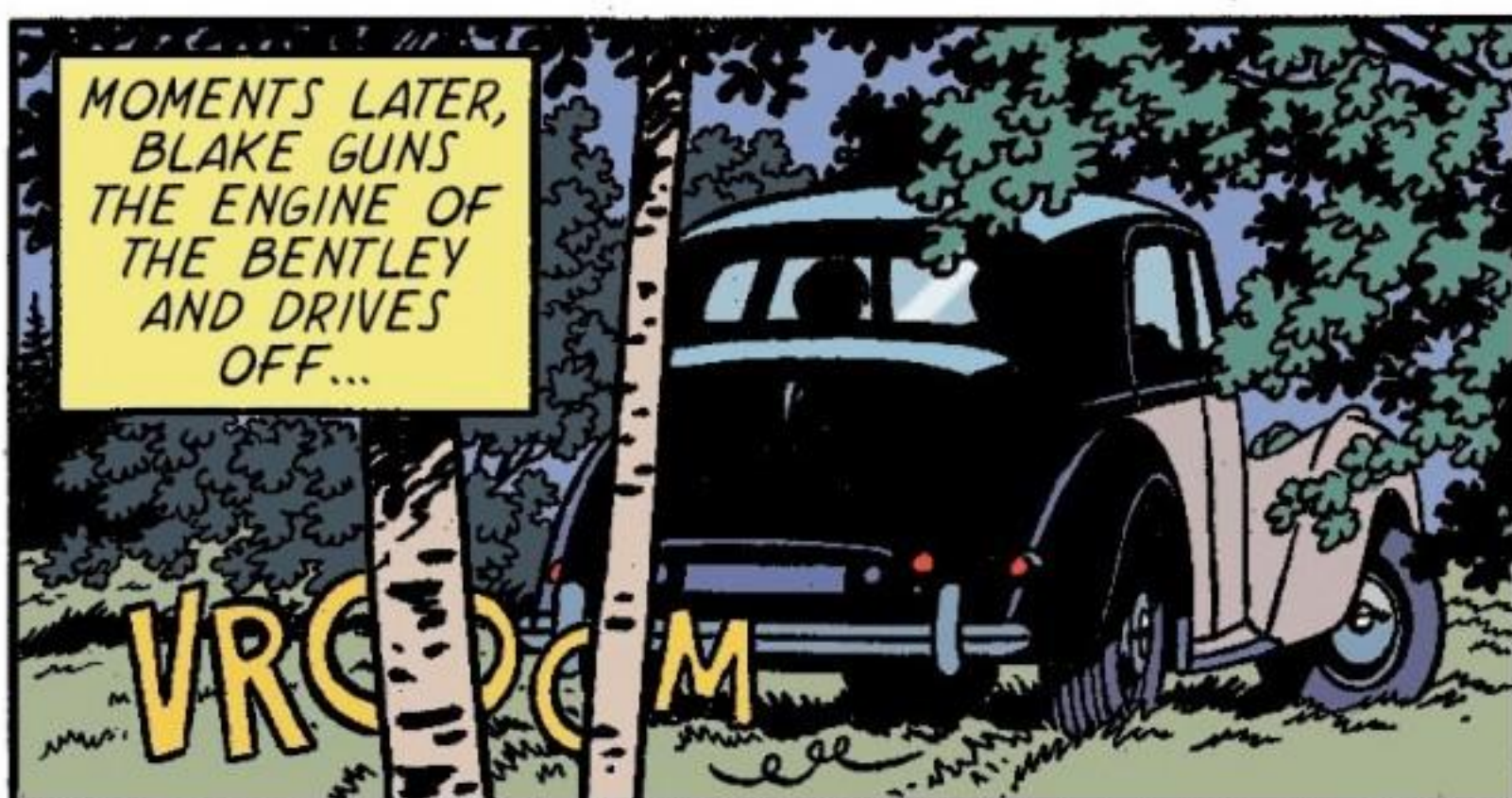
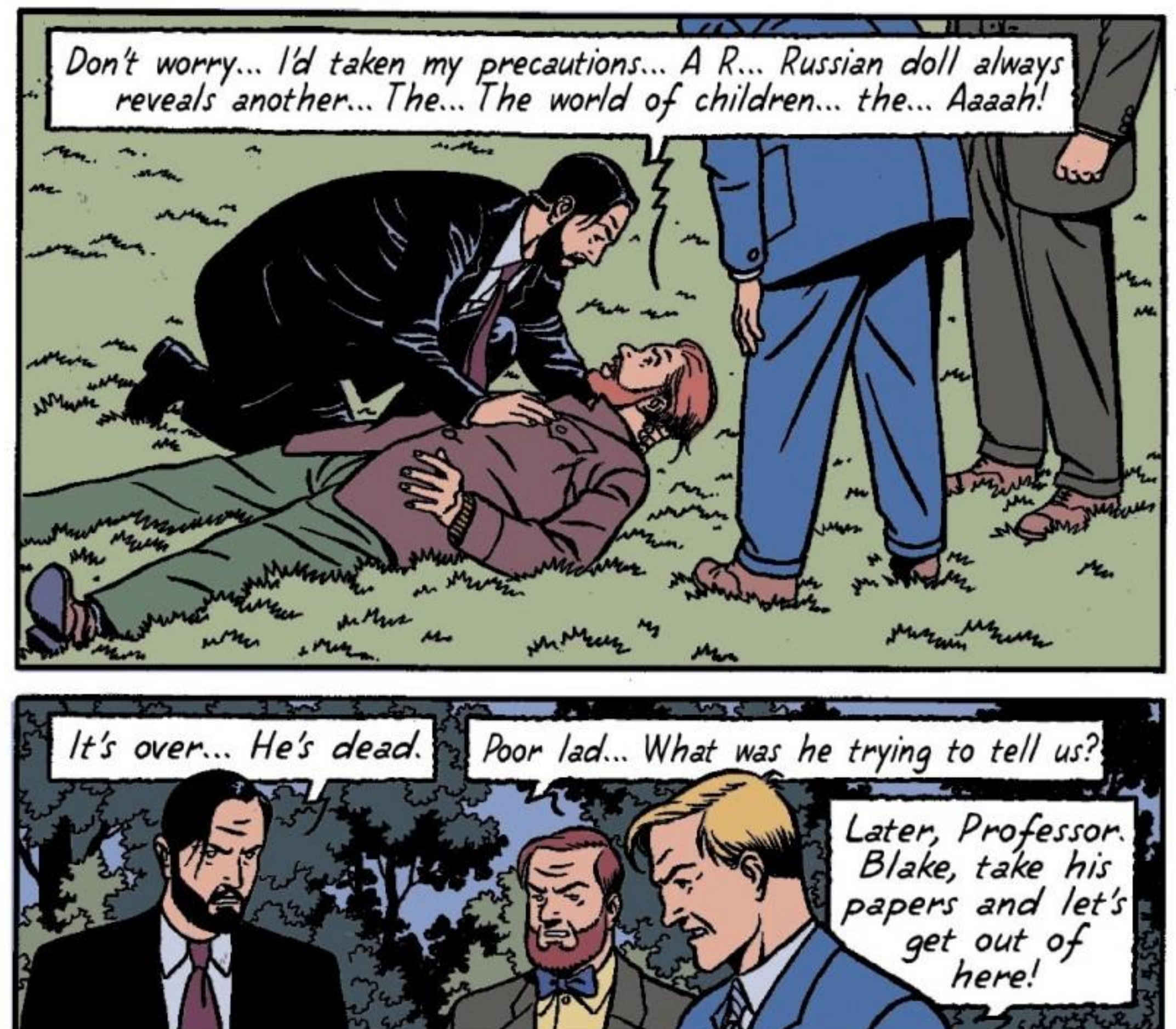


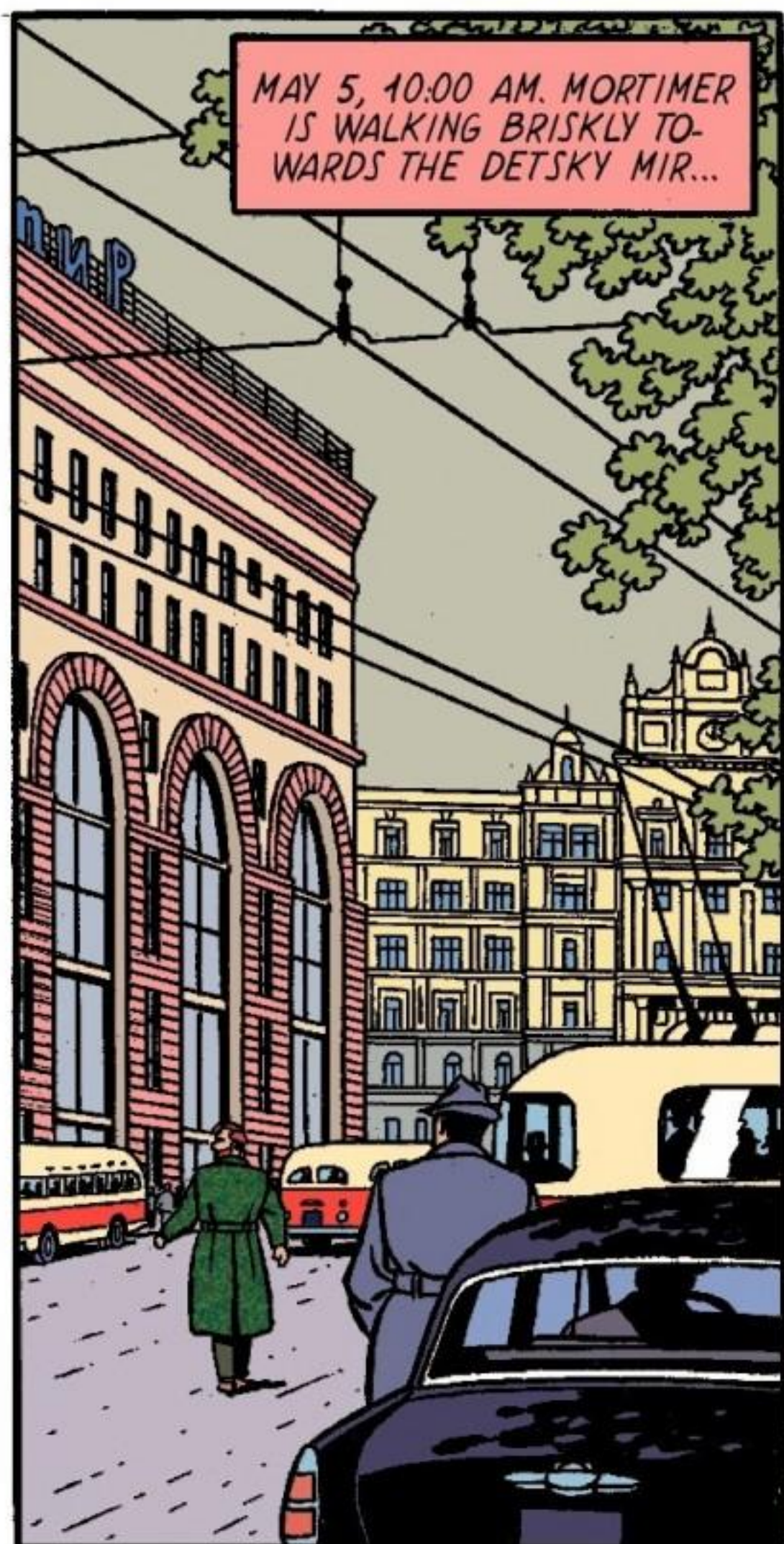
OLRIK!!

You disappoint me, Captain! That superb beard doesn't do much to change an appearance I know so well. The game ends here for you, old boy.









MAY 5, 10:00 AM. MORTIMER IS WALKING BRISKLY TOWARDS THE DETSKY MIR...



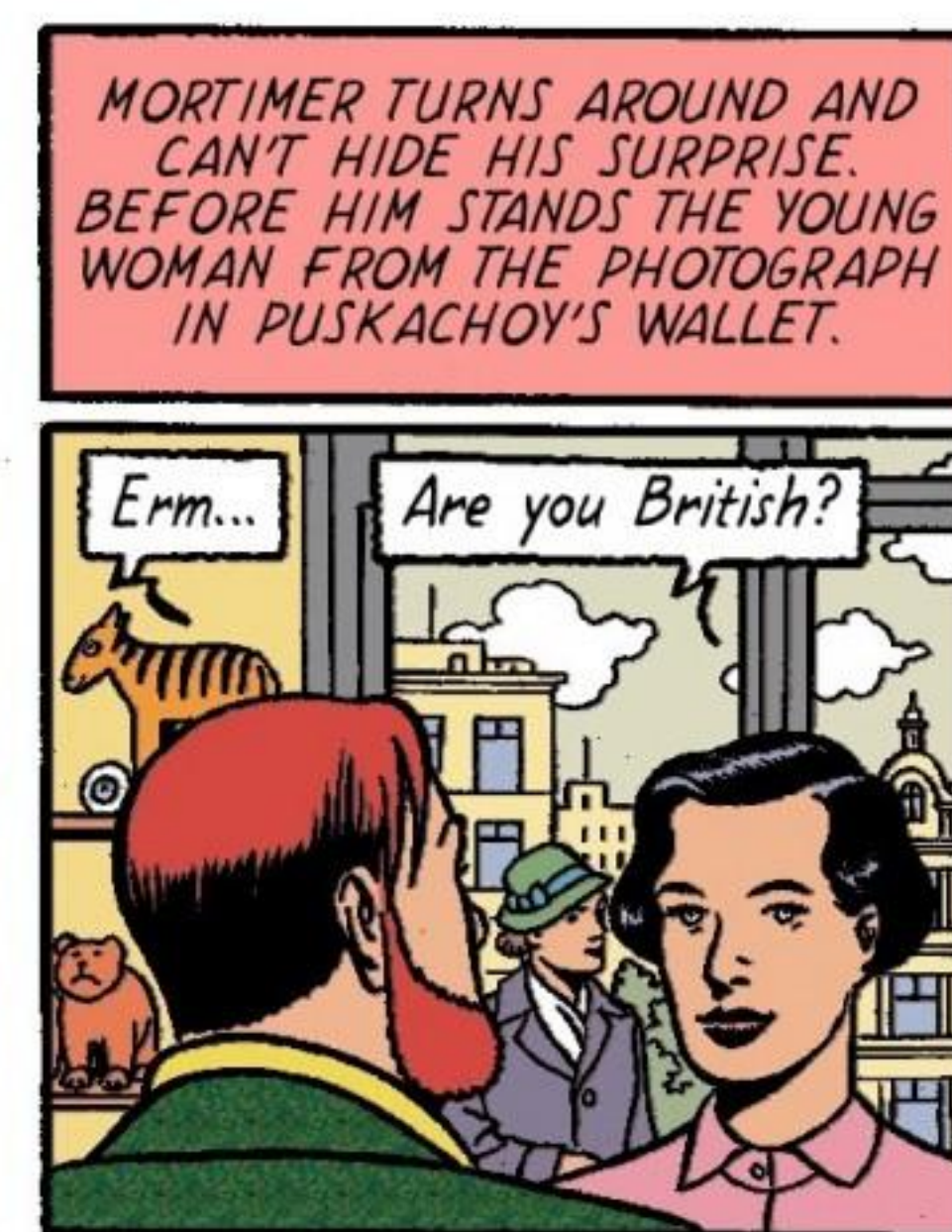
HE STEPS INTO THE STORE, FOLLOWED, OF COURSE, BY A NOT-VERY-DISCREET KGB AGENT.



AFTER STROLLING ABOUT THE EXHIBITS, MORTIMER REACHES THE SHELVES OF NESTED DOLLS...

I might as well be looking for a needle in a haystack!

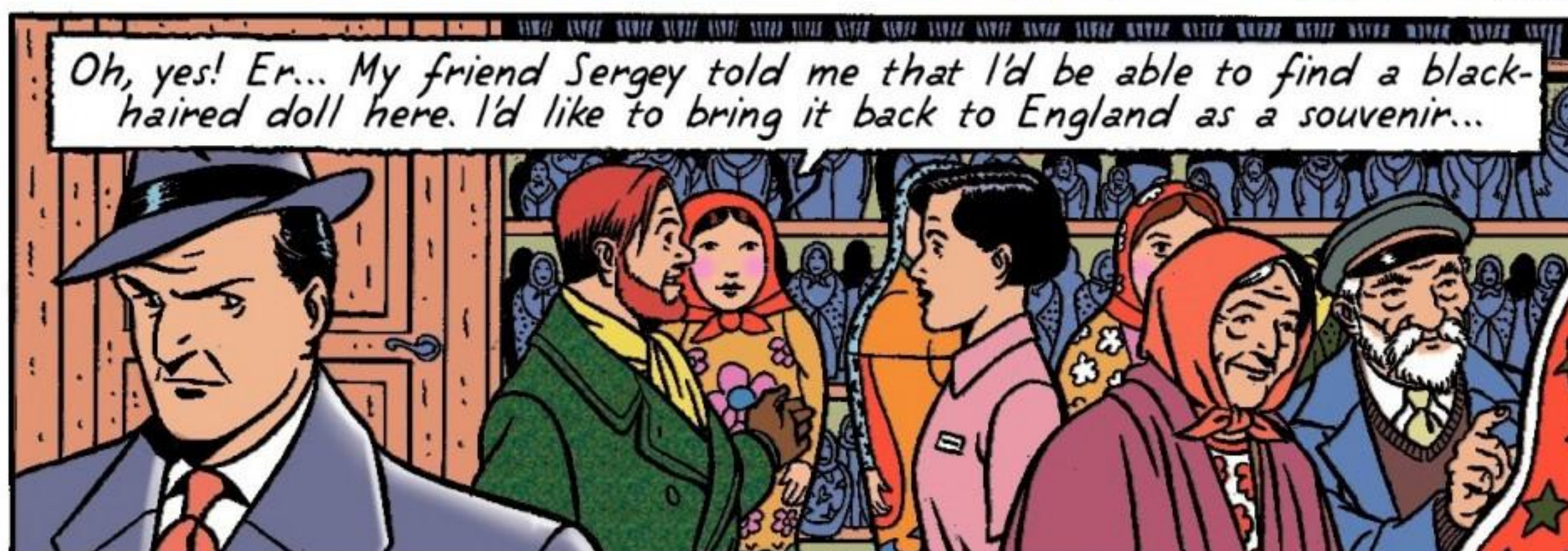
Can I help you, sir?



MORTIMER TURNS AROUND AND CAN'T HIDE HIS SURPRISE. BEFORE HIM STANDS THE YOUNG WOMAN FROM THE PHOTOGRAPH IN PUSKACHOV'S WALLET.

Erm...

Are you British?



Oh, yes! Er... My friend Sergey told me that I'd be able to find a black-haired doll here. I'd like to bring it back to England as a souvenir...



FOR A FEW SECONDS, THE SALESWOMAN STARES INTENTLY AT MORTIMER'S FACE, AS IF THE BETTER TO GAUGE HIM.



I think I have what you need. I'll be right back.



LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES LATER, THE YOUNG WOMAN IS BACK.

There you are, sir. That'll be 100 rubles.



Fifty... and there's 100.

Er... Pardon me, sir... How is your friend S... Sergey?



THE SALESWOMAN WALKS AWAY WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, WHILE THE PROFESSOR KEEPS TABS ON HIS "GUARDIAN ANGEL" OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE.



SURPRISED BY THE QUESTION, THE PROFESSOR LOOKS UP TOWARDS THE SALESWOMAN. FINDING HER EYES TEARING UP, MORTIMER FINDS CONFIRMATION THAT THE YOUNG WOMAN MUST HAVE BEEN VERY ATTACHED TO PUSKACHOV.



SEEING THE LOOK OF DEEP COMPASSION SPREADING OVER THE BRITON'S FACE, PUSKACHOV'S COMPANION UNDERSTANDS THE MEANING OF THE PROFESSOR'S SILENCE.

I understand... Good luck, sir. Take your doll back to London... That's what Sergey would have wanted.



You have my word, miss. Good luck to you, too.



MORTIMER THEN HEADS FOR THE STORE'S EXIT, HIS HEART HEAVY WITH CONFLICTING EMOTIONS. OF COURSE, THEY'VE FINALLY MANAGED TO RECOVER THE BACTERIA Z SAMPLE. BUT AT WHAT PRICE!...



TWO DAYS LATER, VNUKOVO AIRPORT. A ROLLS ROYCE CARRYING THE AMBASSADOR OF GREAT BRITAIN STOPS IN FRONT OF THE MAIN ENTRANCE. LORD GREYMOUTH STEPS OUT IMMEDIATELY, FOLLOWED BY PROFESSOR MORTIMER AND HIS ASSISTANT MACTASER.

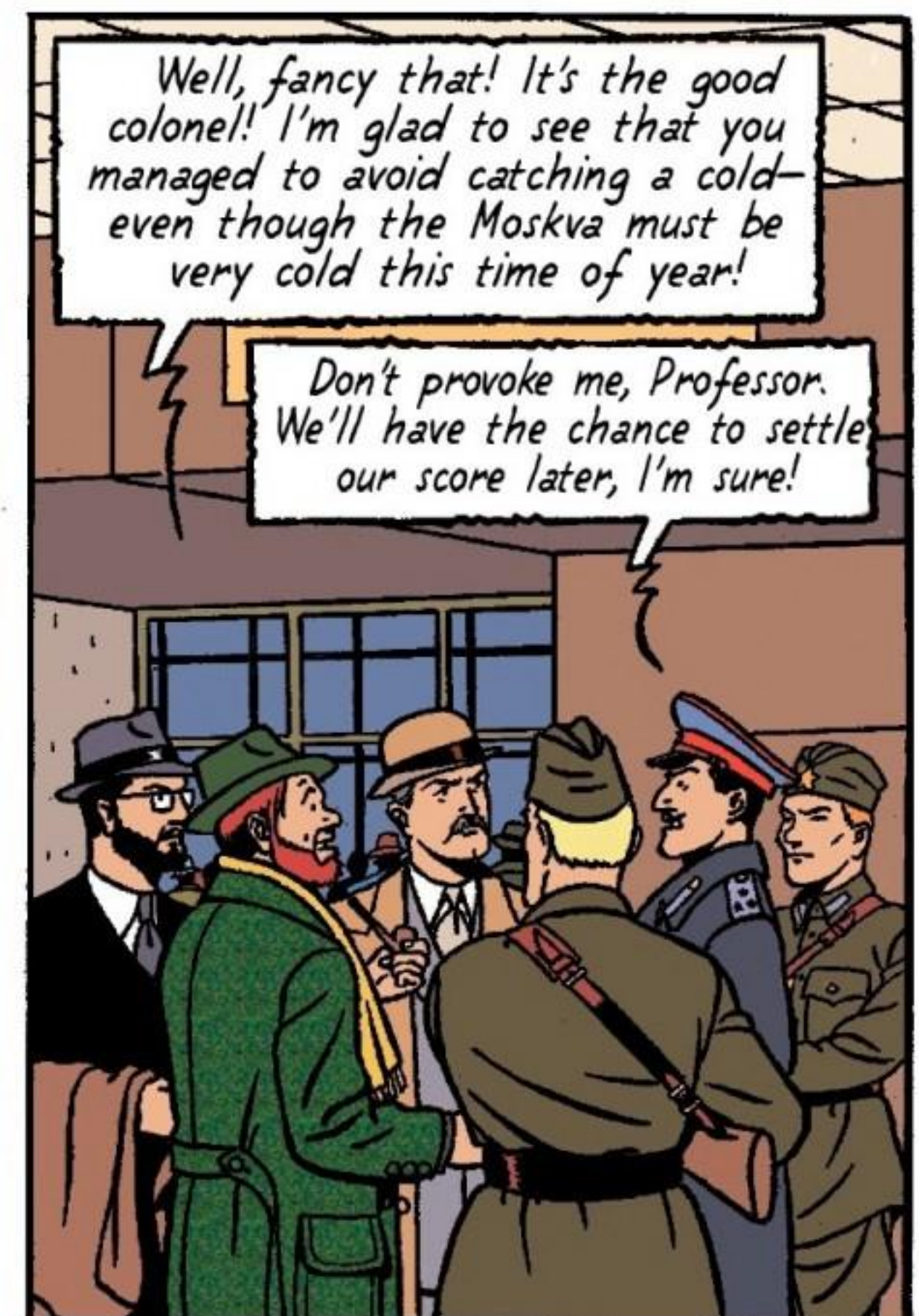


SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, THE SMALL GROUP HEADS TOWARDS THE CUSTOMS OFFICE RESERVED FOR DIPLOMATS AND OFFICIAL GUESTS.

That's them. Let's go!



One moment, gentlemen!



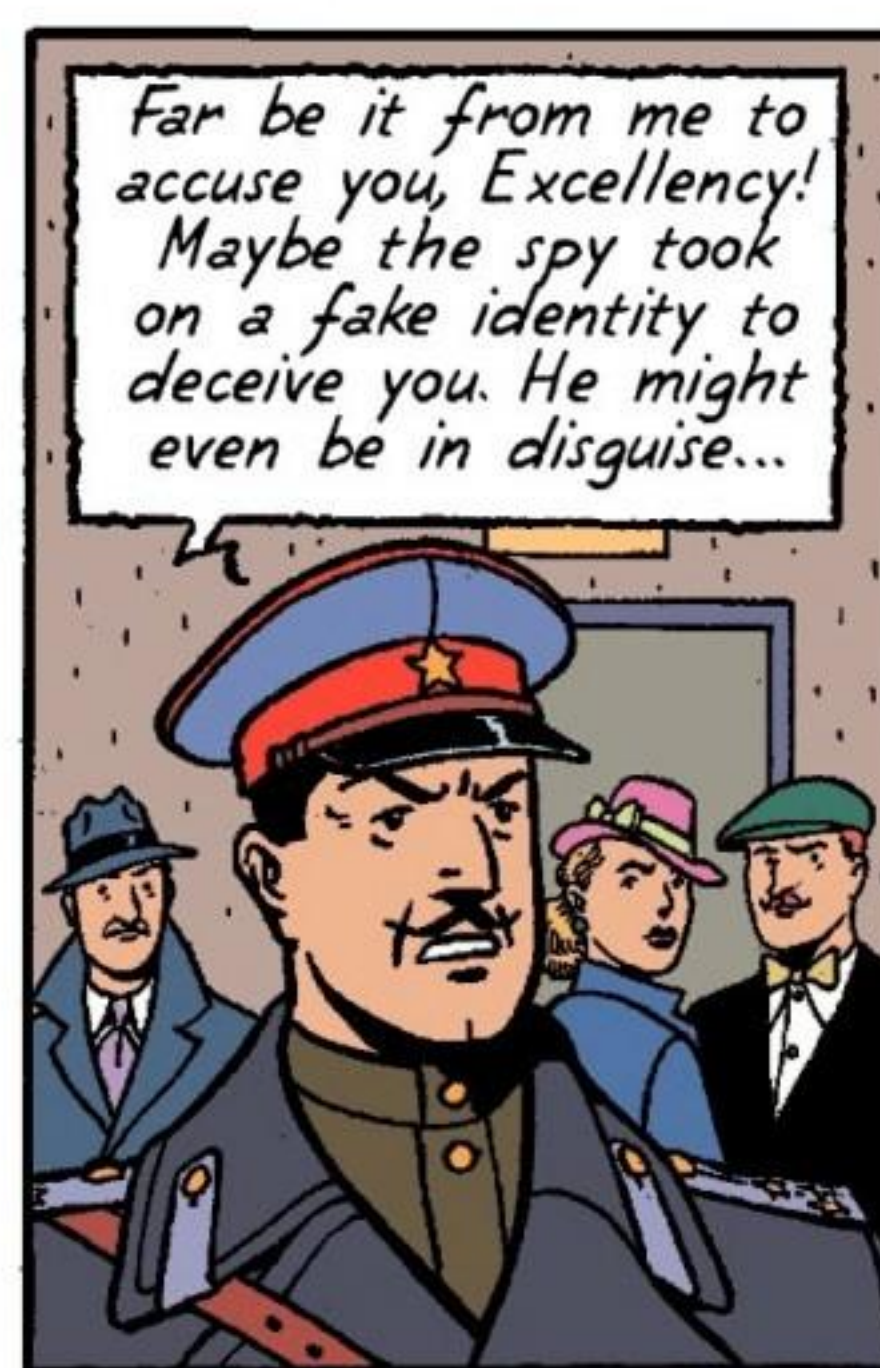
Well, fancy that! It's the good colonel! I'm glad to see that you managed to avoid catching a cold—even though the Moskva must be very cold this time of year!

Don't provoke me, Professor. We'll have the chance to settle our score later, I'm sure!

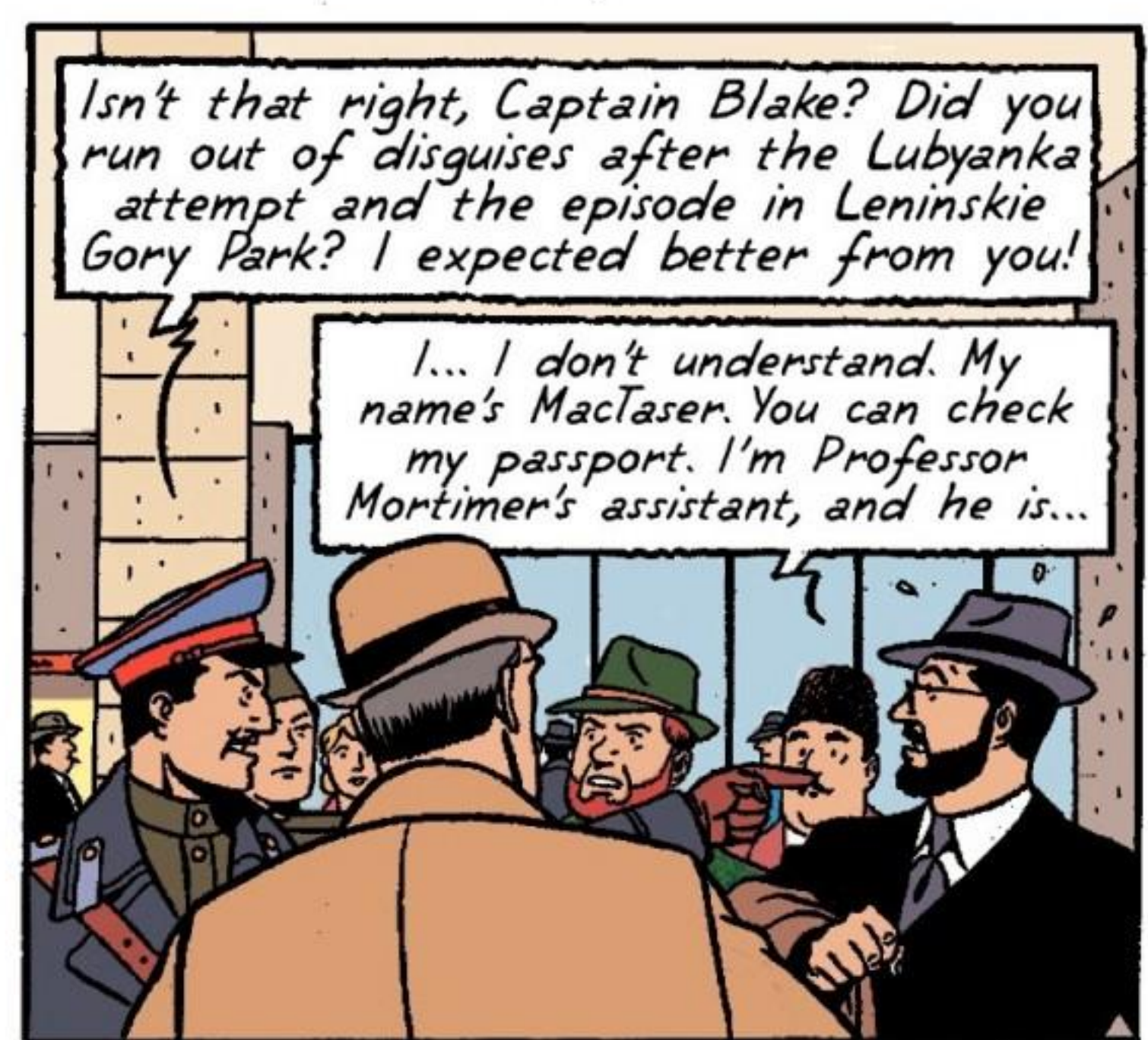


I'm sorry to have to impose, Excellency, but we have been informed that a spy recently entered our country and might be trying to return to London by...

Colonel! Are you implying that my friends here are spies, and that I'd be covering for them?! Do you realise the seriousness of your accusations?



Far be it from me to accuse you, Excellency! Maybe the spy took on a fake identity to deceive you. He might even be in disguise...



Isn't that right, Captain Blake? Did you run out of disguises after the Lubyanka attempt and the episode in Leninskie Gory Park? I expected better from you!

I... I don't understand. My name's MacTaser. You can check my passport. I'm Professor Mortimer's assistant, and he is...



I know the professor very well. And generally, when he's here...



SUDDENLY, OLRİK GIVES THE BEARD OF THE PROFESSOR'S ASSISTANT A SHARP TUG.



... you're close by, Captain!!

Oww!

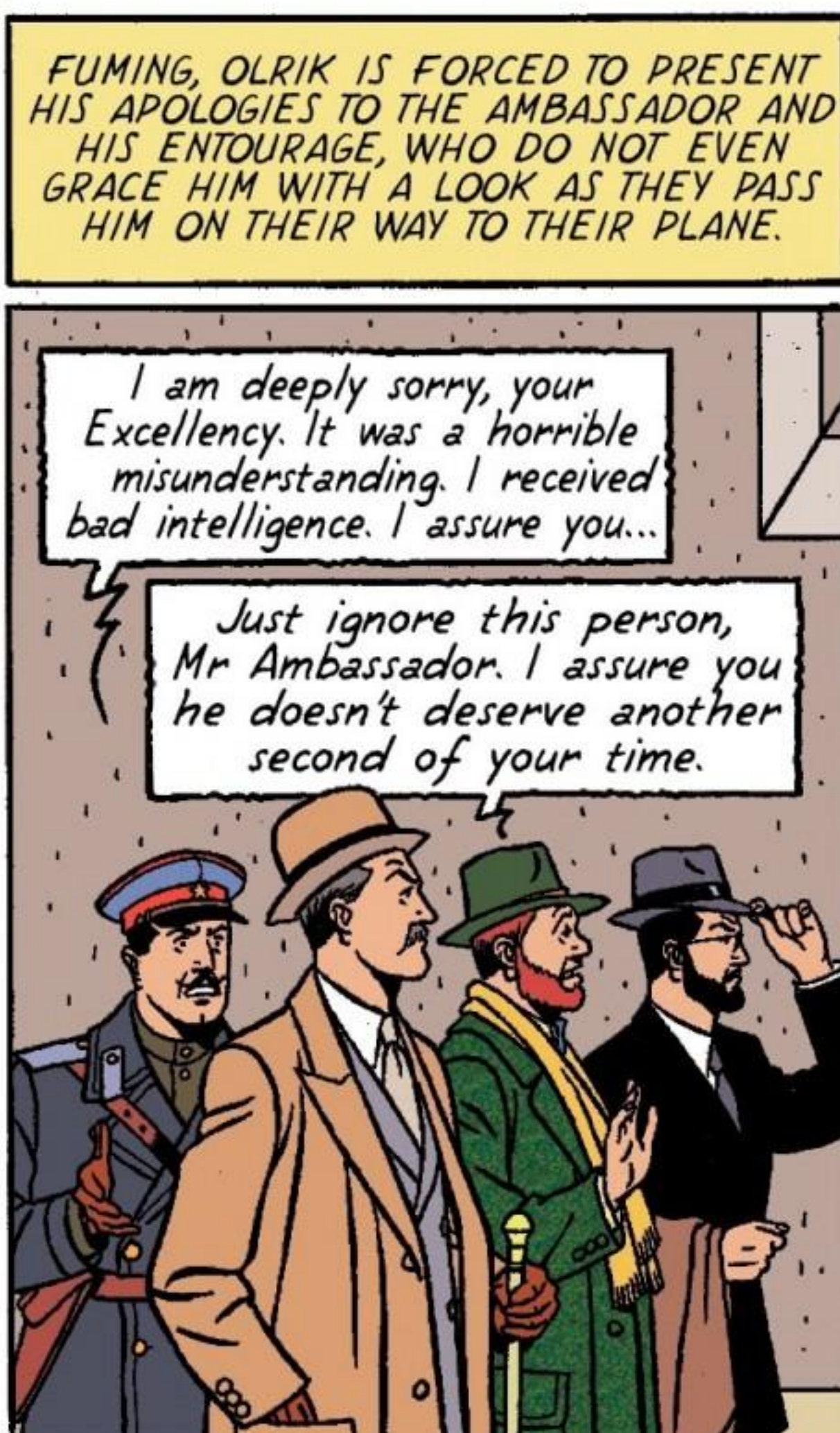


Are you insane, Colonel? I'll remind you that these gentlemen are official guests of your government. What about the diplomatic immunity of an official guest? Be sure that you'll be hearing from me. I'll go to the top with this!

That's not possible! This beard has to be a fake!... I...

You truly never miss an opportunity to make yourself look like a fool, Colonel. I wouldn't insist if I were you. Goodbye!

Mff...



FUMING, OLRİK IS FORCED TO PRESENT HIS APOLOGIES TO THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS ENTOURAGE, WHO DO NOT EVEN GRACE HIM WITH A LOOK AS THEY PASS HIM ON THEIR WAY TO THEIR PLANE.

I am deeply sorry, your Excellency. It was a horrible misunderstanding. I received bad intelligence. I assure you...

Just ignore this person, Mr Ambassador. I assure you he doesn't deserve another second of your time.



LESS THAN 20 MINUTES LATER...

We'll meet again, Professor Mortimer! And I'll make you pay for your insults, I swear!

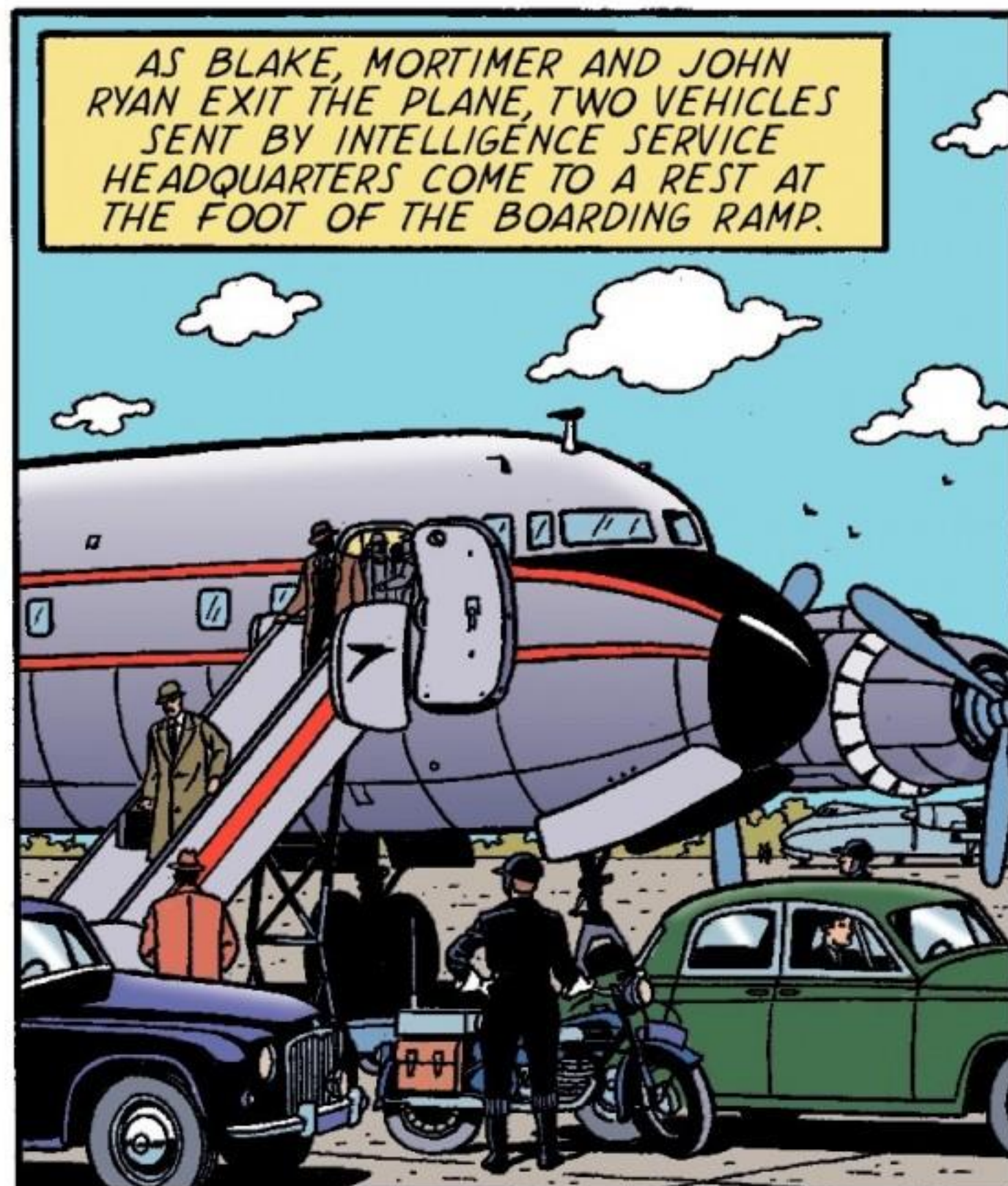


HA! HA! HA! The look on Olrik's face! I'll never forget it.

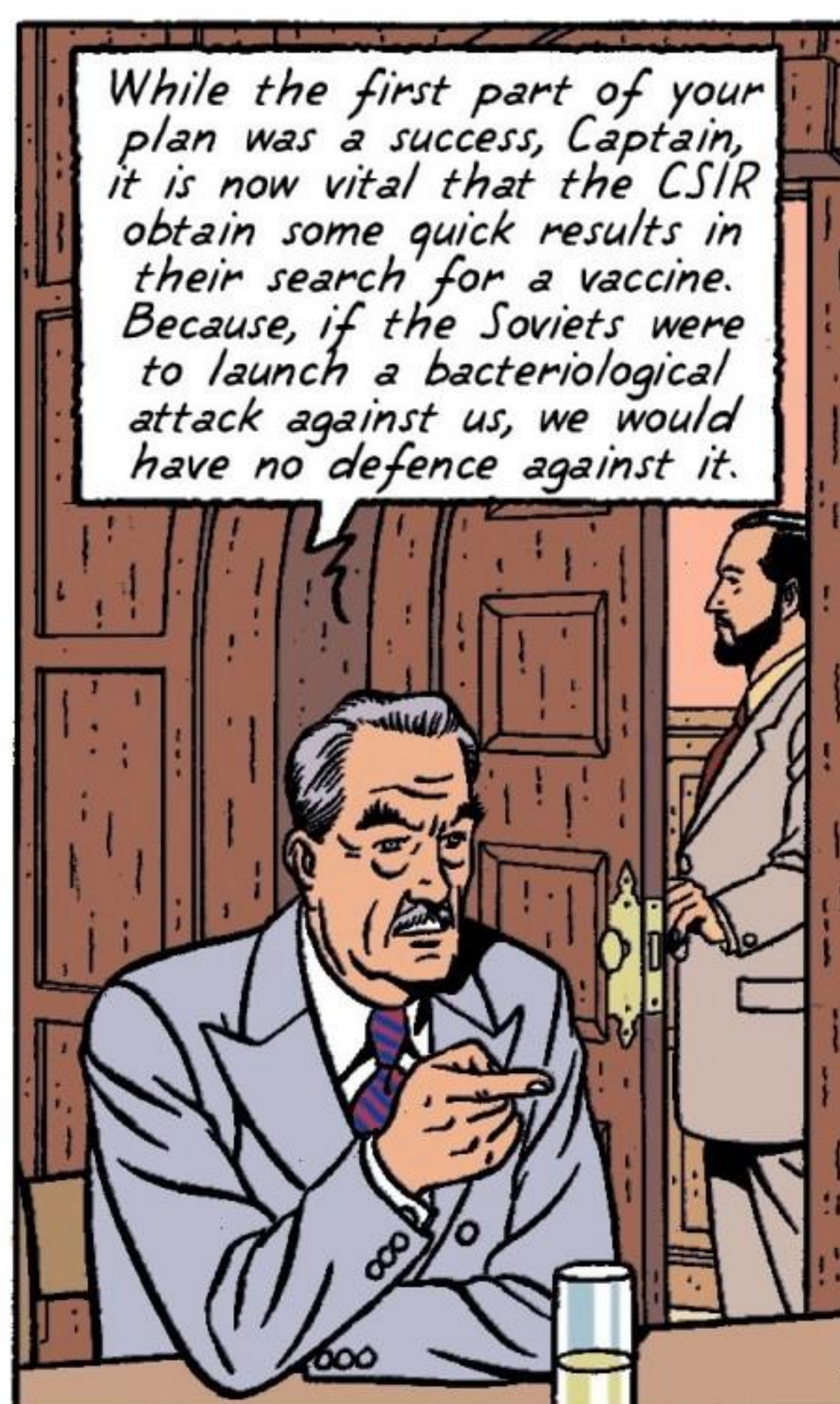
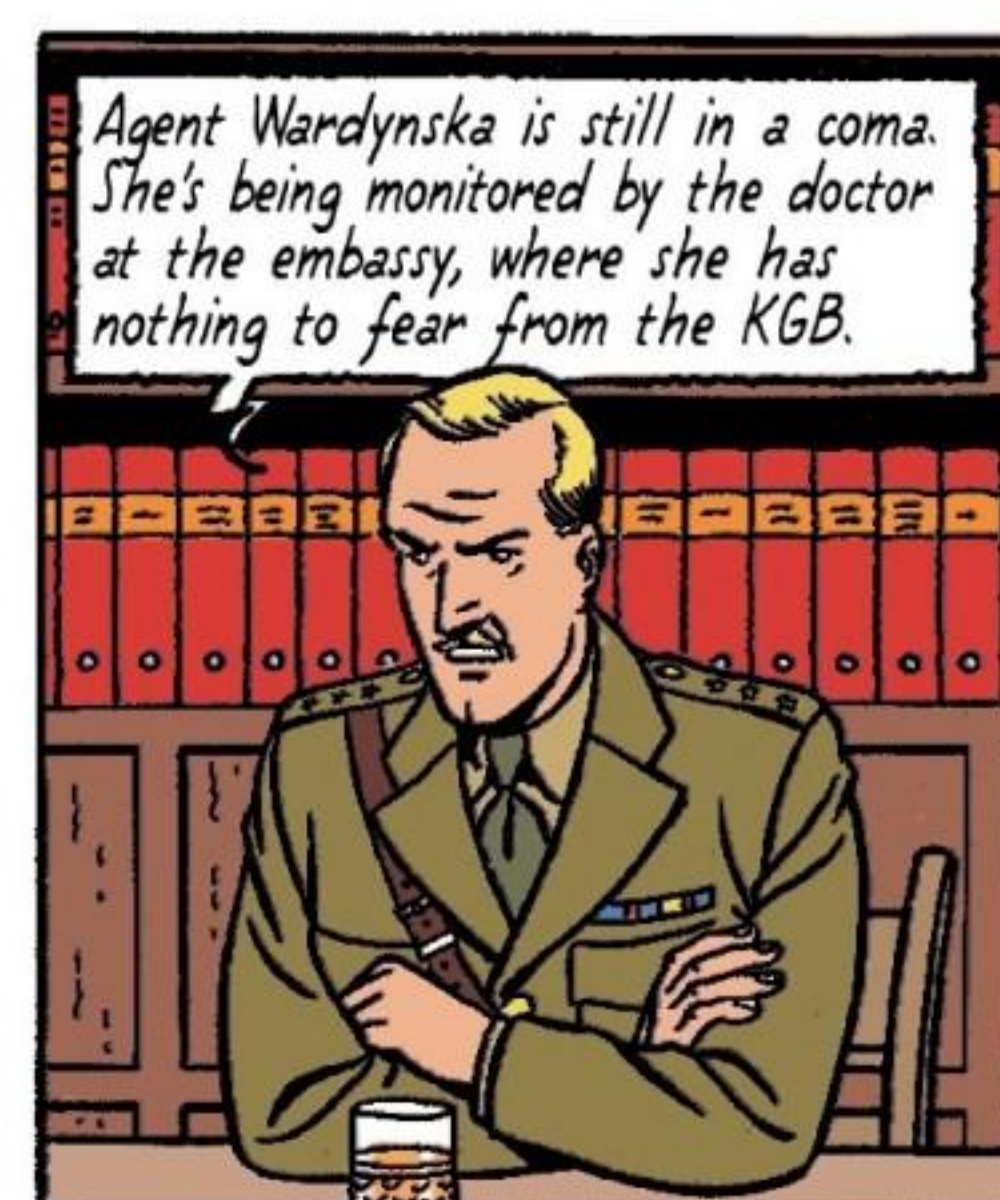
What a performance! You were absolutely perfect in the role, John!

So were you, Captain. At times, I could have sworn it was Lord Greymouth speaking!

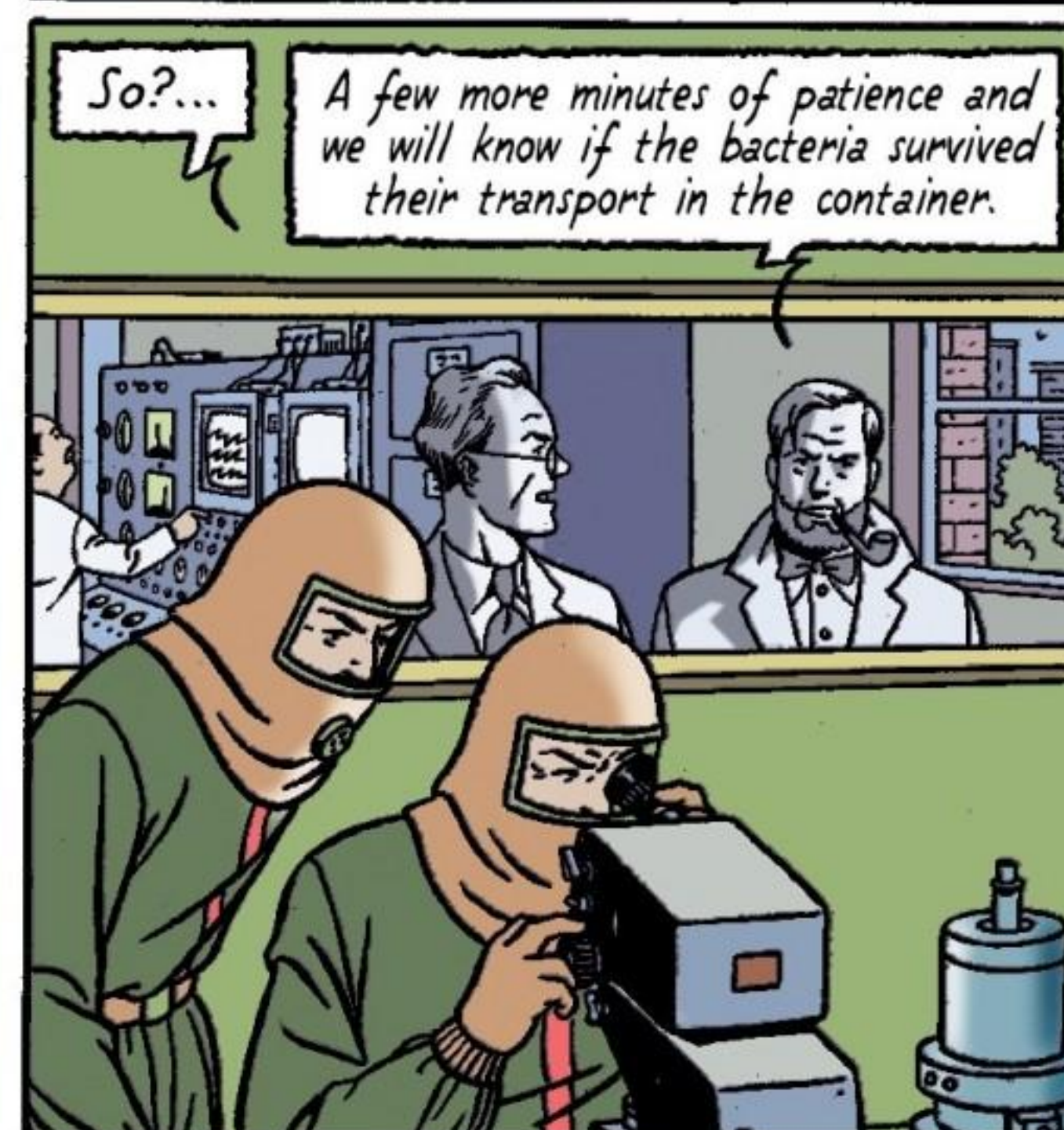
Would you like some refreshments, gentlemen?



THREE HOURS LATER, CAPTAIN BLAKE IS CONCLUDING HIS REPORT INSIDE AN OFFICE IN SCOTLAND YARD. GATHERED THERE ARE: COLONEL CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE; POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR CHARLES GARRISON, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCOTLAND YARD; COMMANDER WILLIAM STEELE, HEAD OF M16; DAVID HONEYCHURCH, BLAKE'S DEPUTY AT M16; LORD NORWICH, UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE; AND THE NEW UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE AT THE HOME OFFICE, COUNT WILBUR HEREFORD-WORCESTER...



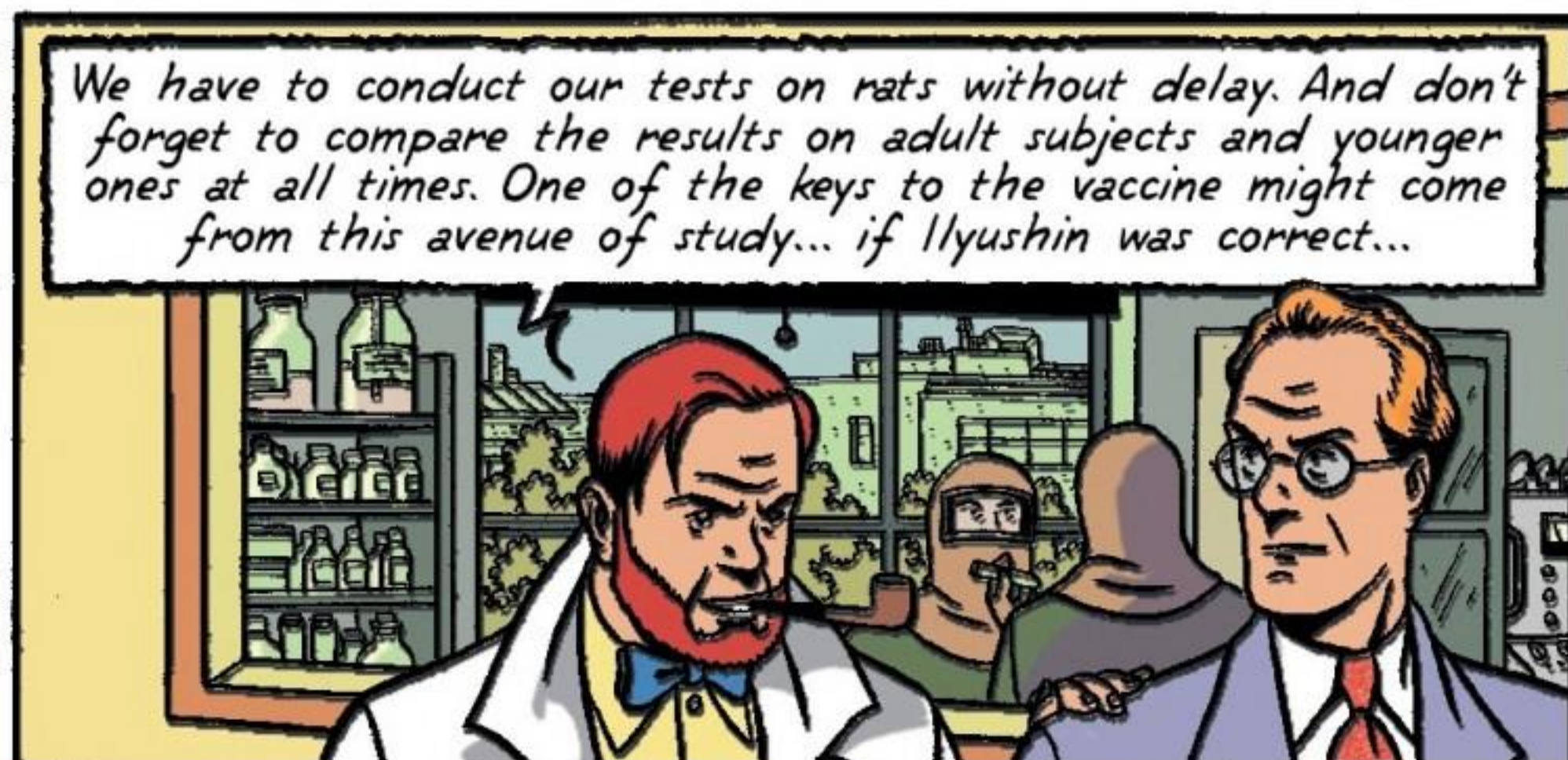
MEANWHILE, IN THE CSIR, TENSIONS ARE HIGH. UPON PROFESSOR MORTIMER'S ARRIVAL, THE BACTERIA Z SAMPLE IS EXTRACTED FROM ITS CONTAINER INSIDE THE BLACK-HAIRED DOLL. IMMEDIATELY, A TEAM IS PUT IN CHARGE OF THE BACTERIA'S "REANIMATION"—THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS A CONTROLLED CULTIVATION IN PETRI DISHS.



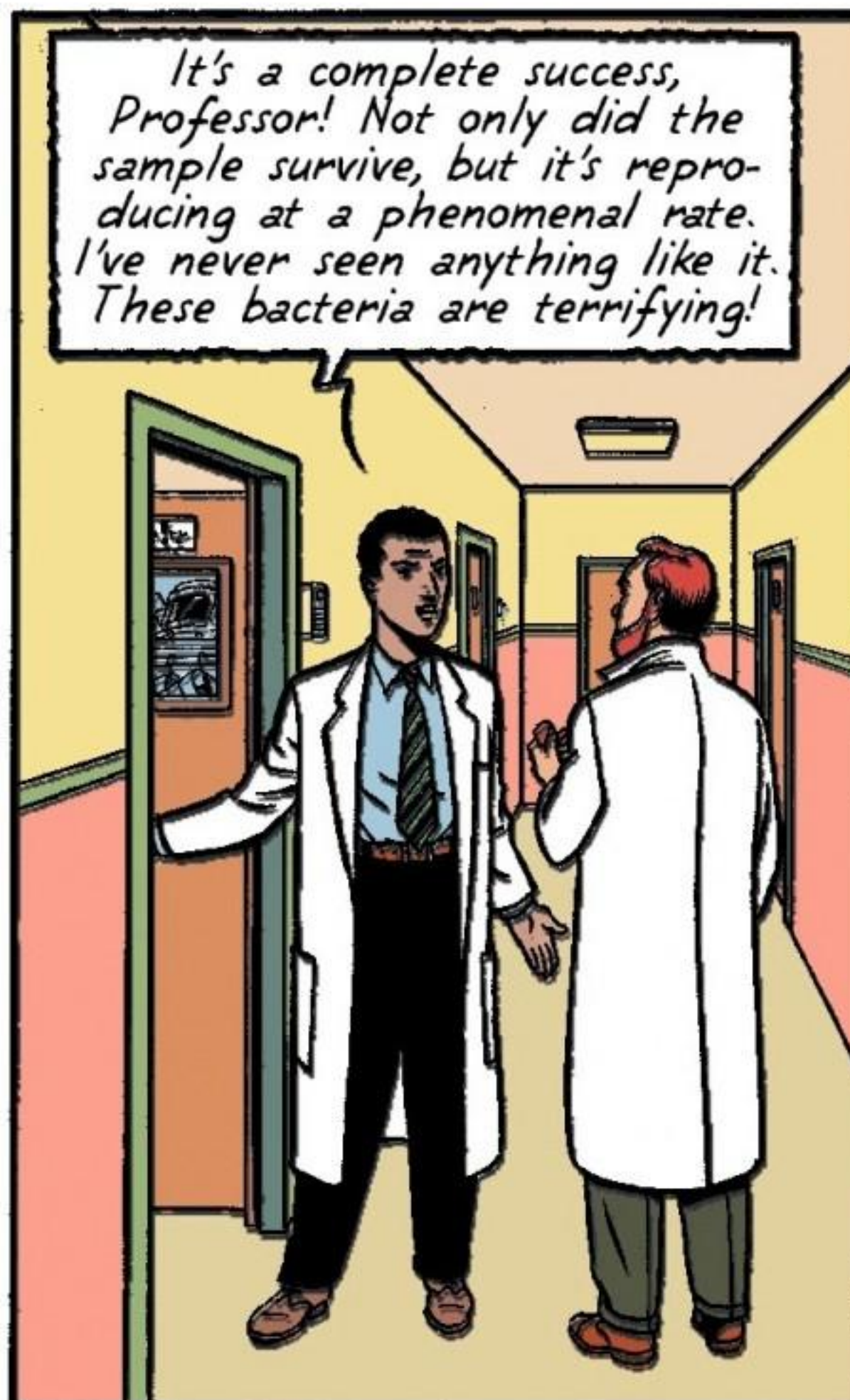


SUDDENLY THE LABORATORY CHIEF TURNS AROUND AND MAKES A VICTORIOUS GESTURE.

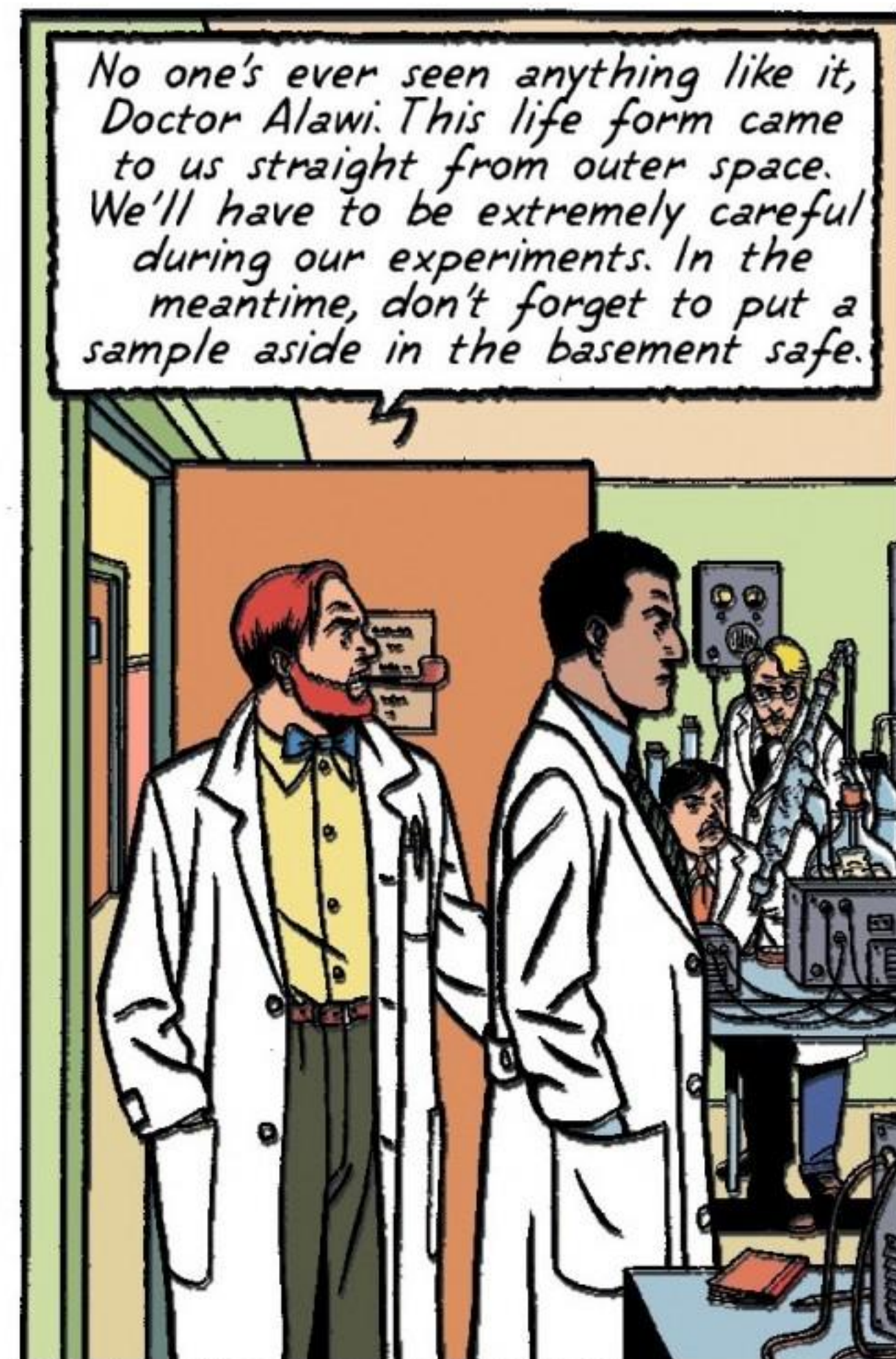
Yes! They've saved the bacteria! We did it, Hubert!



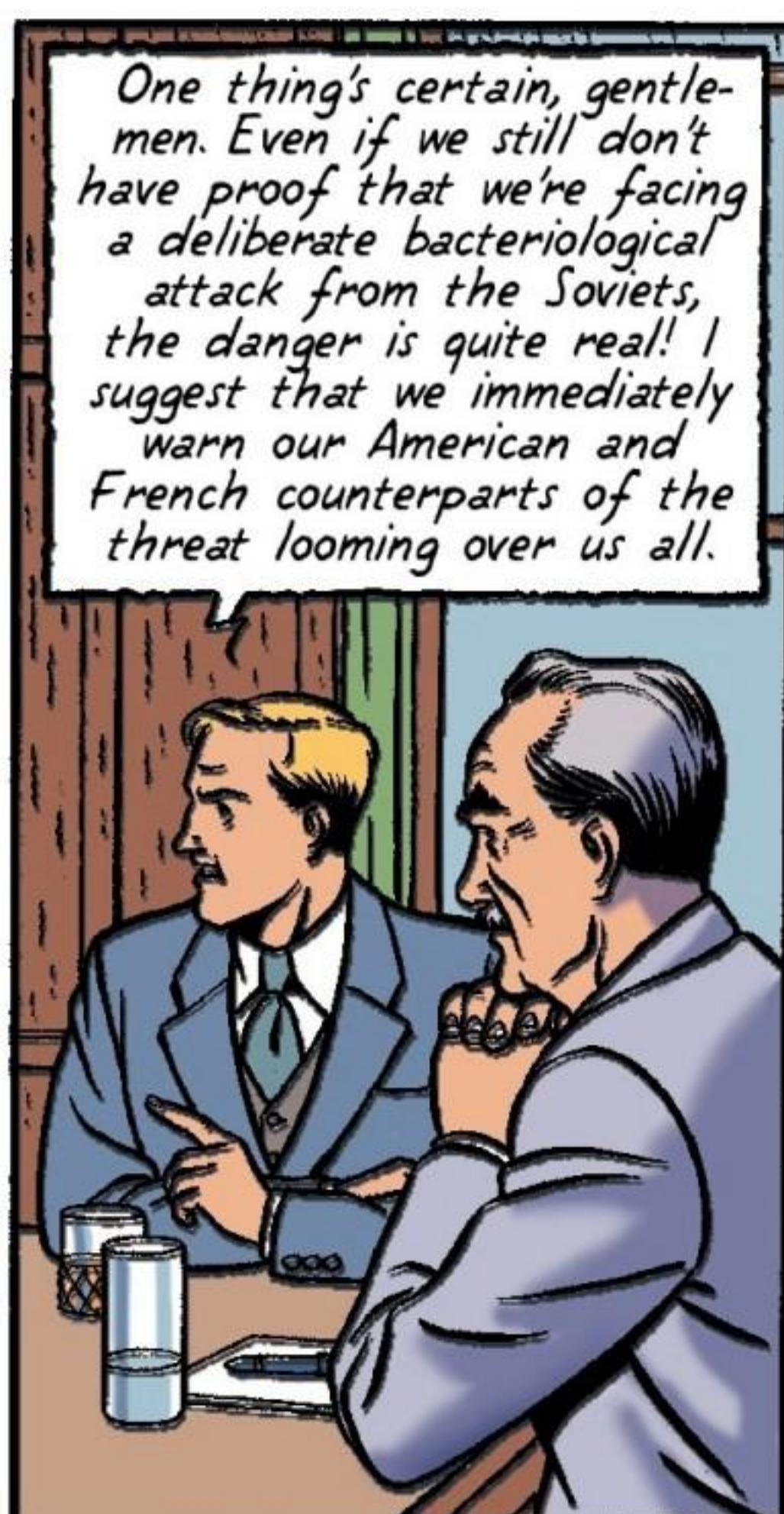
We have to conduct our tests on rats without delay. And don't forget to compare the results on adult subjects and younger ones at all times. One of the keys to the vaccine might come from this avenue of study... if Ilyushin was correct...



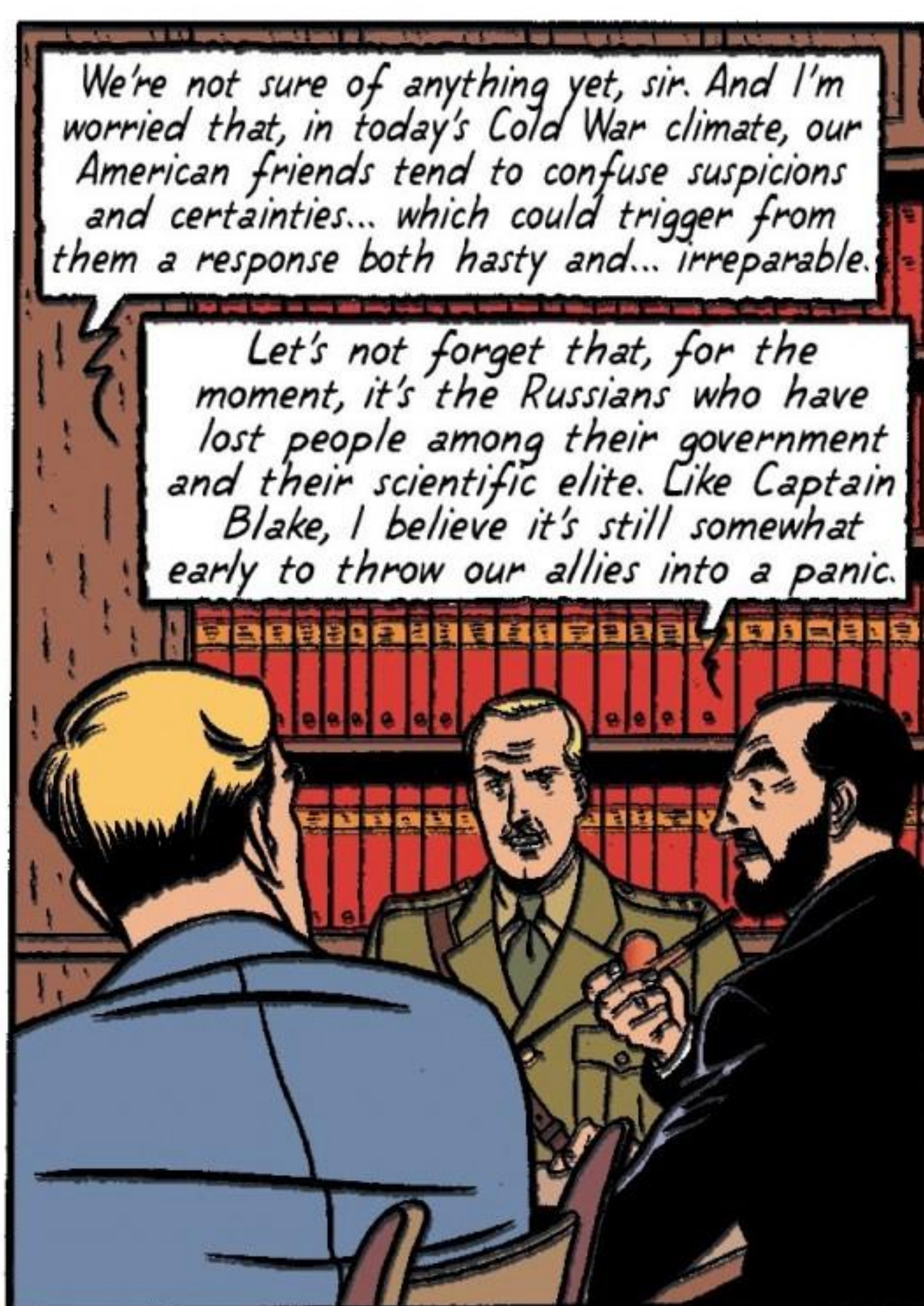
It's a complete success, Professor! Not only did the sample survive, but it's reproducing at a phenomenal rate. I've never seen anything like it. These bacteria are terrifying!



No one's ever seen anything like it, Doctor Alawi. This life form came to us straight from outer space. We'll have to be extremely careful during our experiments. In the meantime, don't forget to put a sample aside in the basement safe.



One thing's certain, gentlemen. Even if we still don't have proof that we're facing a deliberate bacteriological attack from the Soviets, the danger is quite real! I suggest that we immediately warn our American and French counterparts of the threat looming over us all.

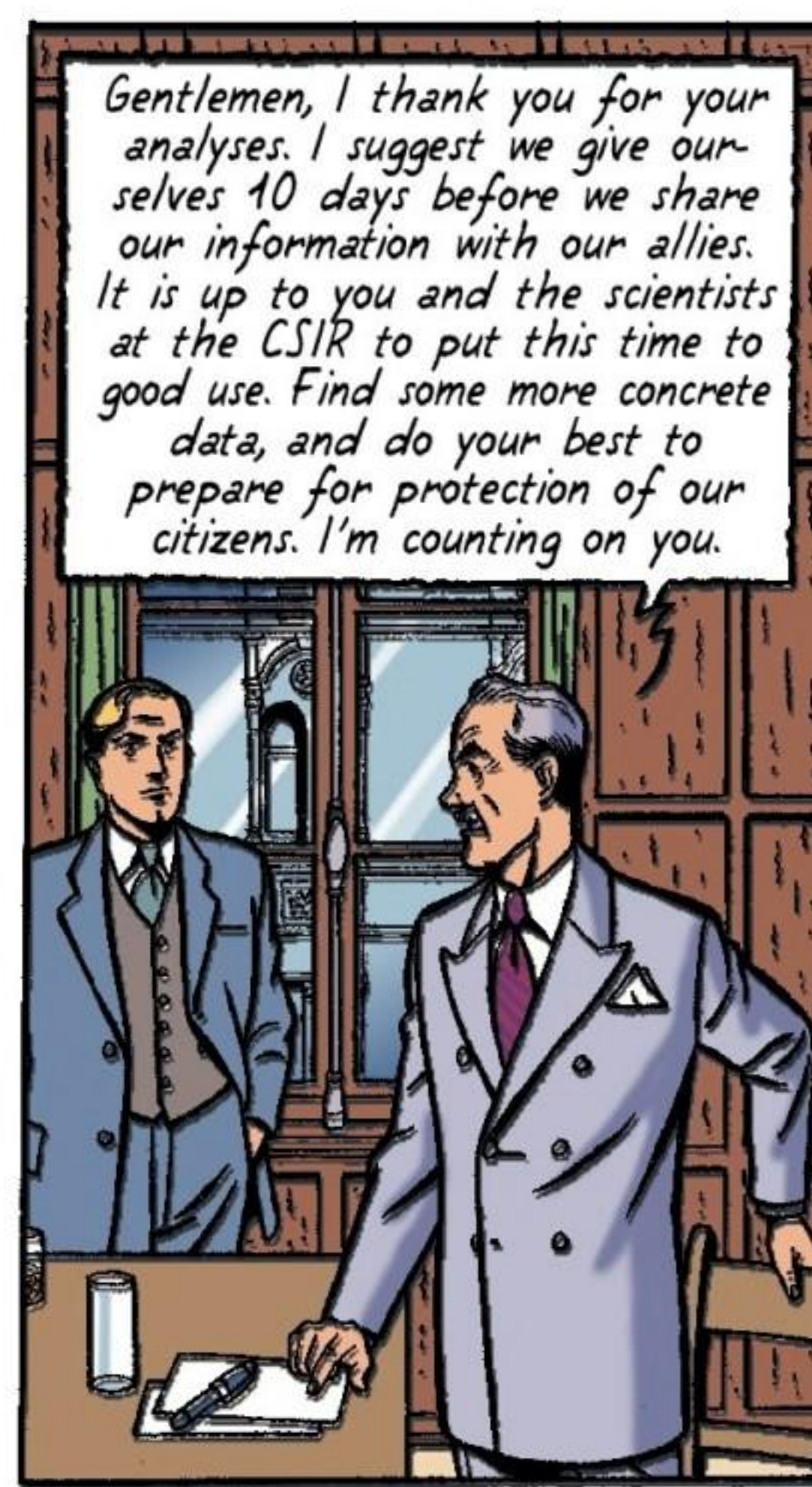


We're not sure of anything yet, sir. And I'm worried that, in today's Cold War climate, our American friends tend to confuse suspicions and certainties... which could trigger from them a response both hasty and... irreparable.

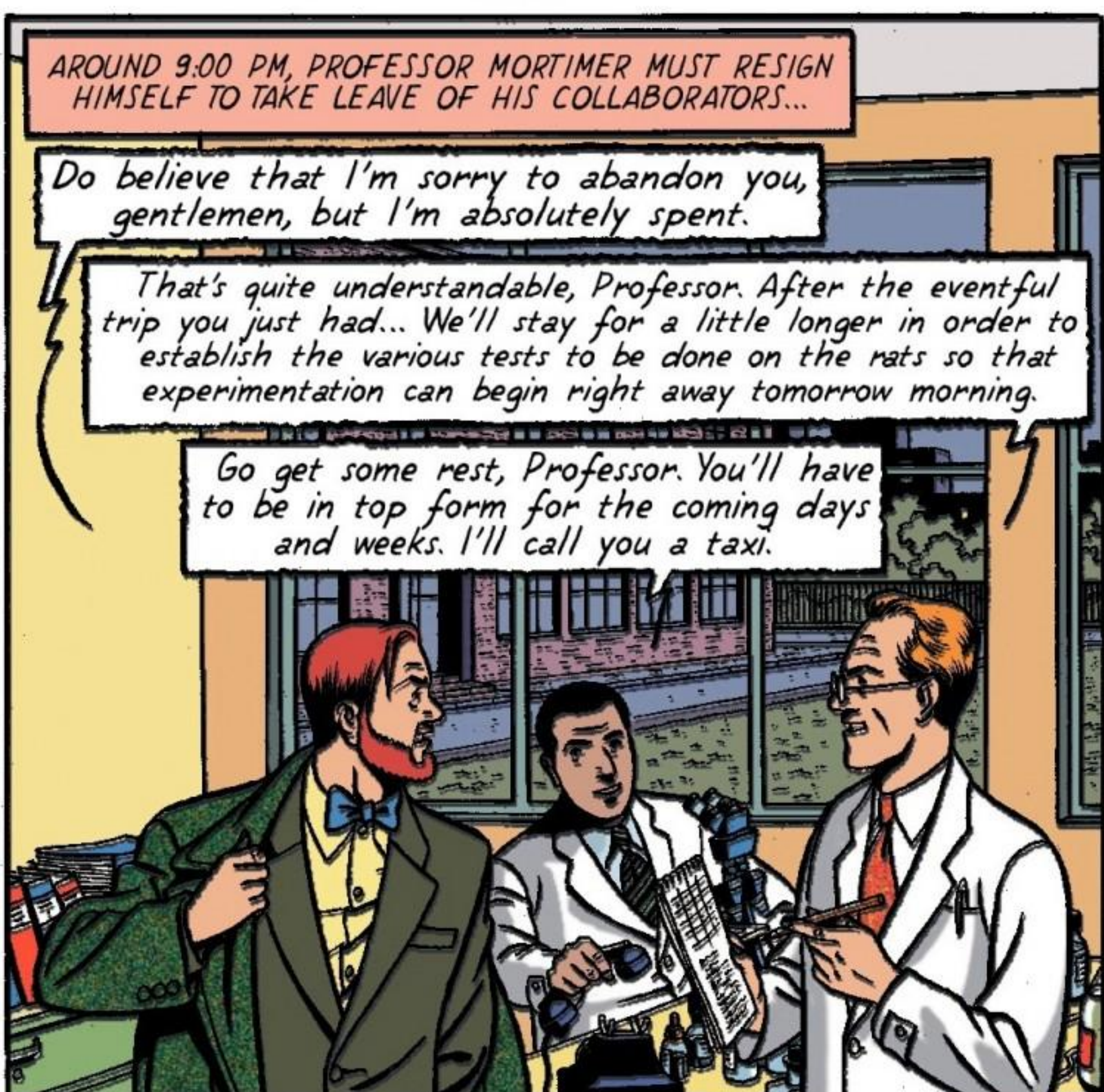
Let's not forget that, for the moment, it's the Russians who have lost people among their government and their scientific elite. Like Captain Blake, I believe it's still somewhat early to throw our allies into a panic.



Personally, I tend to agree with such prudent advice. I, of all people, ought to know that the Americans become rather impulsive any time you talk to them about Soviet threats.



Gentlemen, I thank you for your analyses. I suggest we give ourselves 10 days before we share our information with our allies. It is up to you and the scientists at the CSIR to put this time to good use. Find some more concrete data, and do your best to prepare for protection of our citizens. I'm counting on you.



AROUND 9:00 PM, PROFESSOR MORTIMER MUST RESIGN HIMSELF TO TAKE LEAVE OF HIS COLLABORATORS...

Do believe that I'm sorry to abandon you, gentlemen, but I'm absolutely spent.

That's quite understandable, Professor. After the eventful trip you just had... We'll stay for a little longer in order to establish the various tests to be done on the rats so that experimentation can begin right away tomorrow morning.

Go get some rest, Professor. You'll have to be in top form for the coming days and weeks. I'll call you a taxi.



Ah, here's my taxi. Good night, Jones!

Good night, Professor.

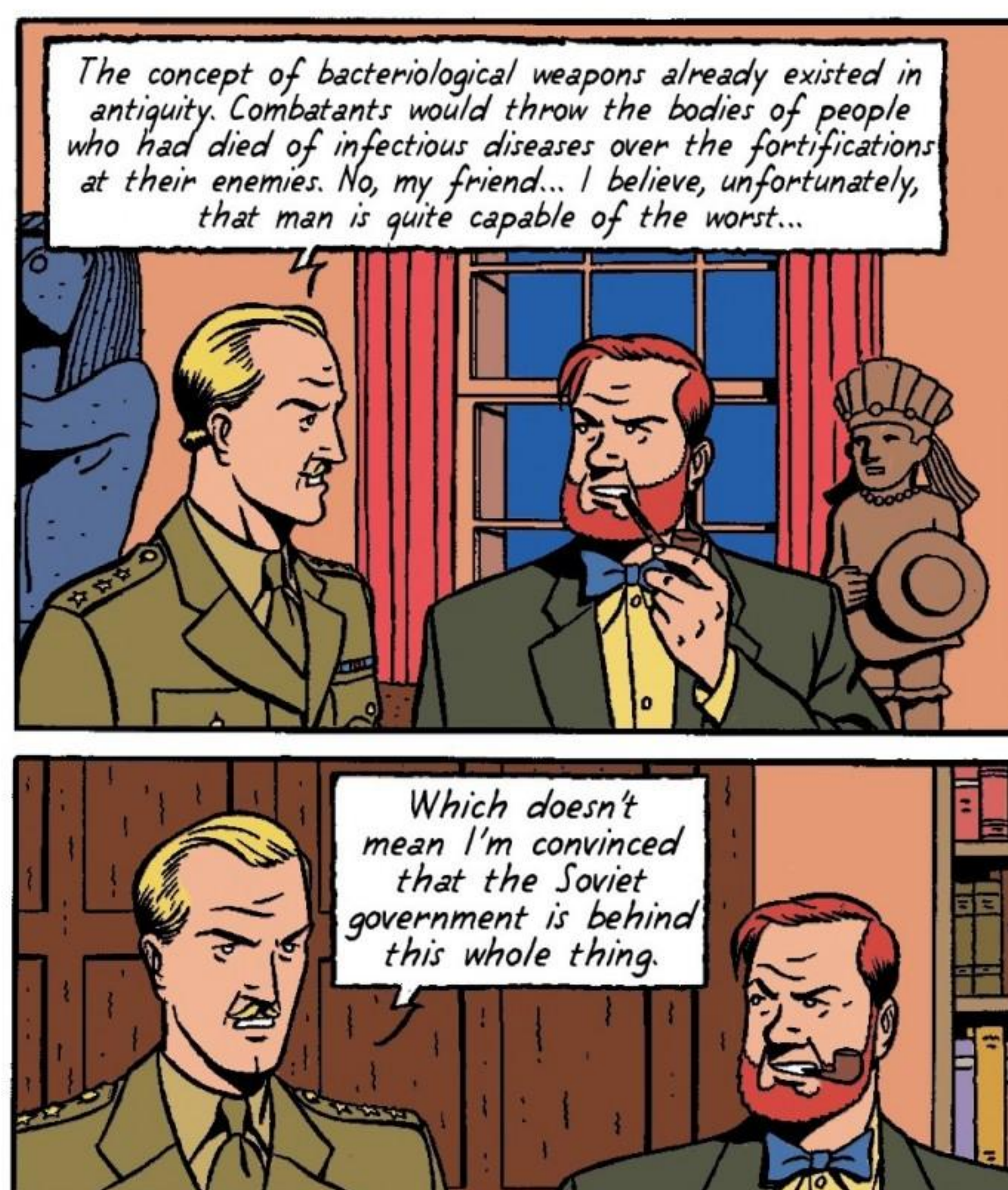
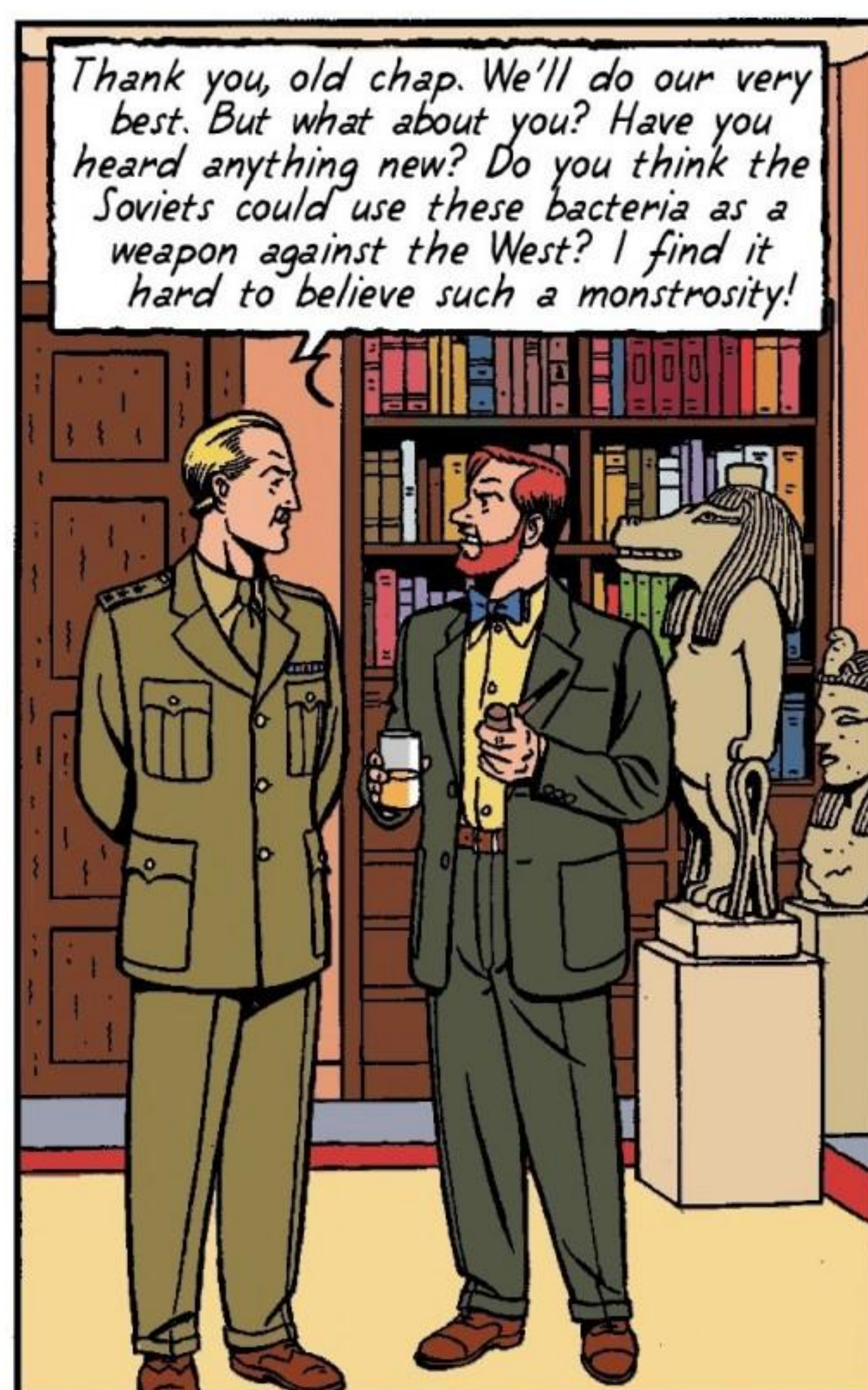
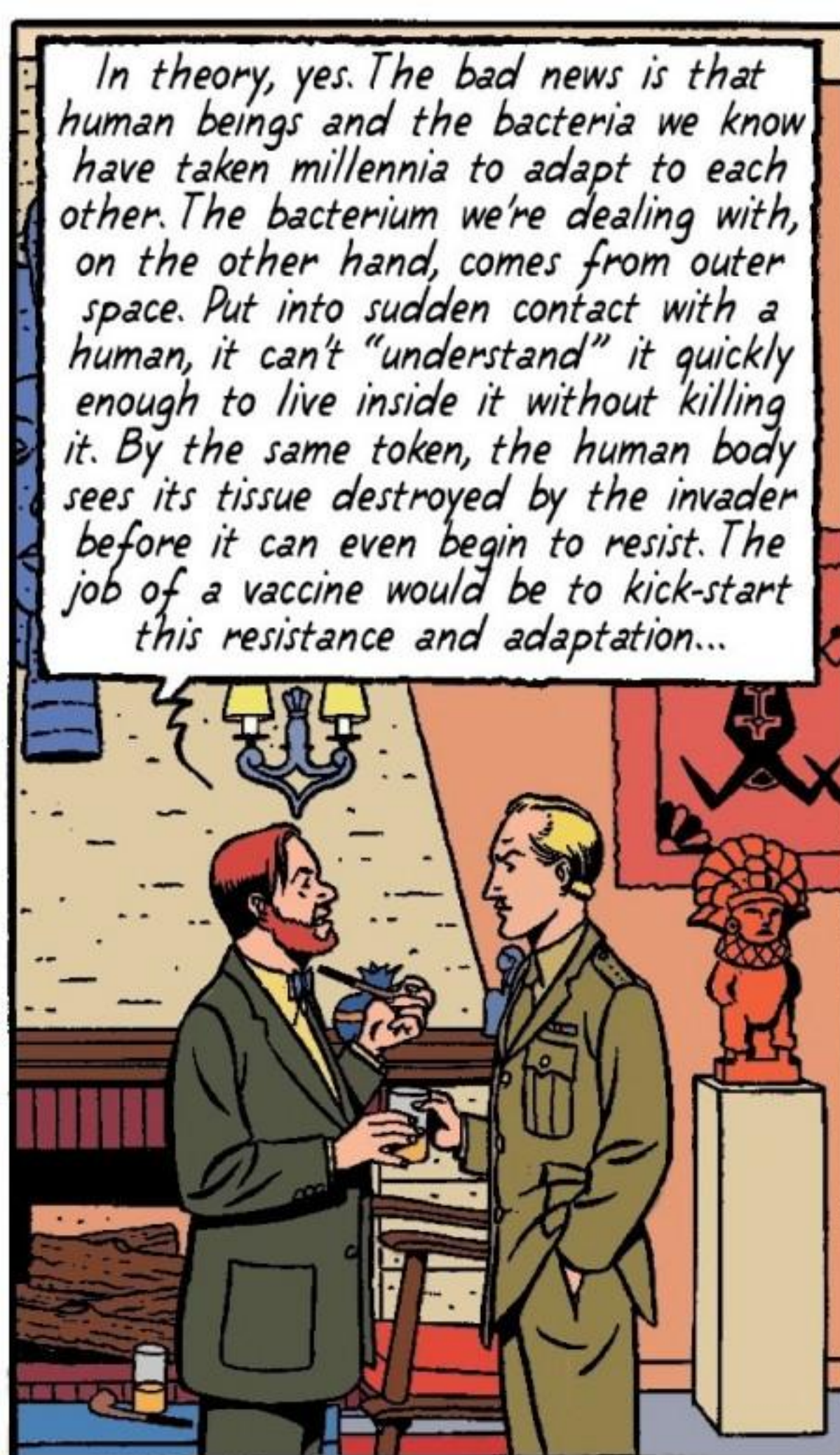
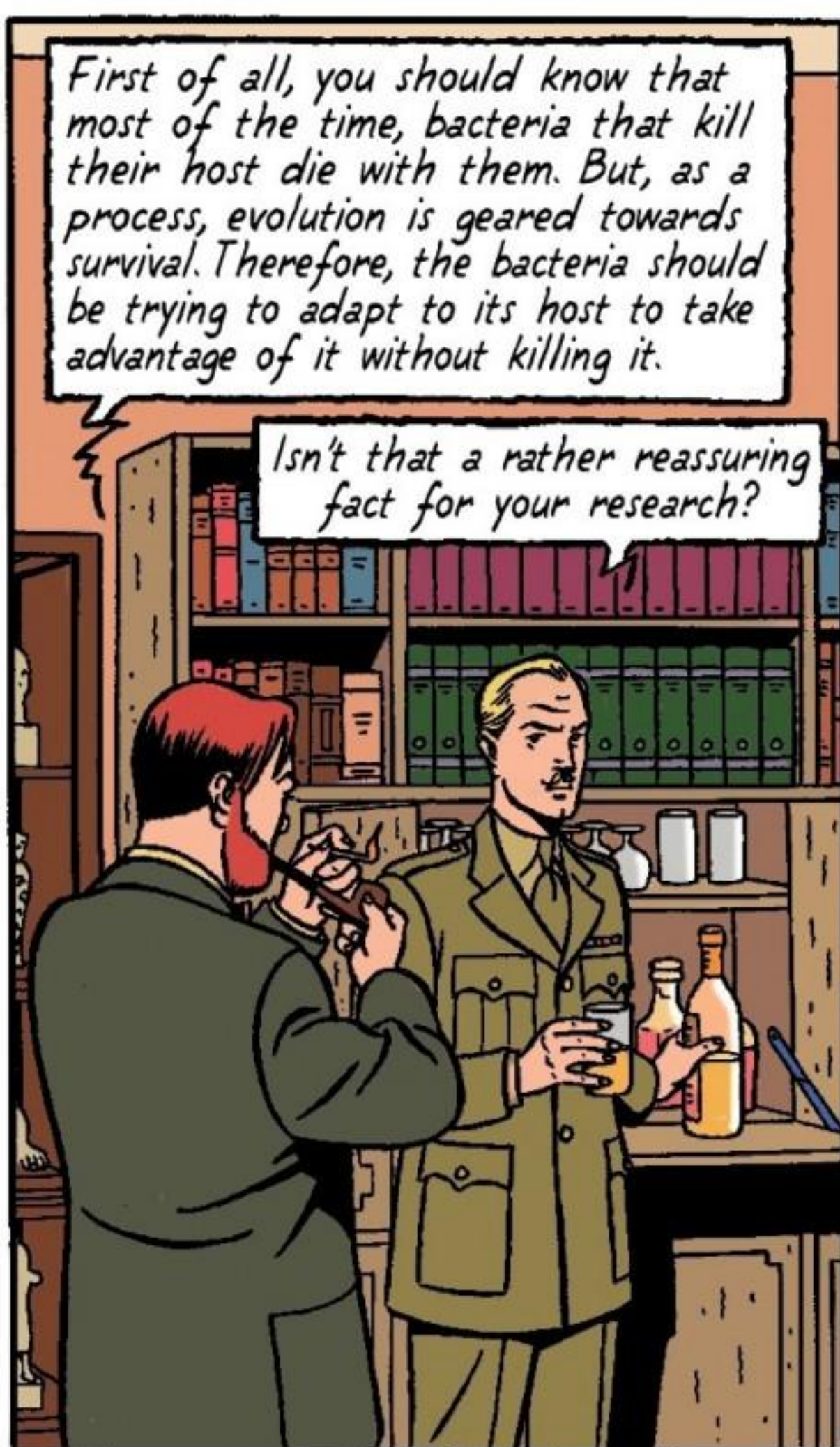
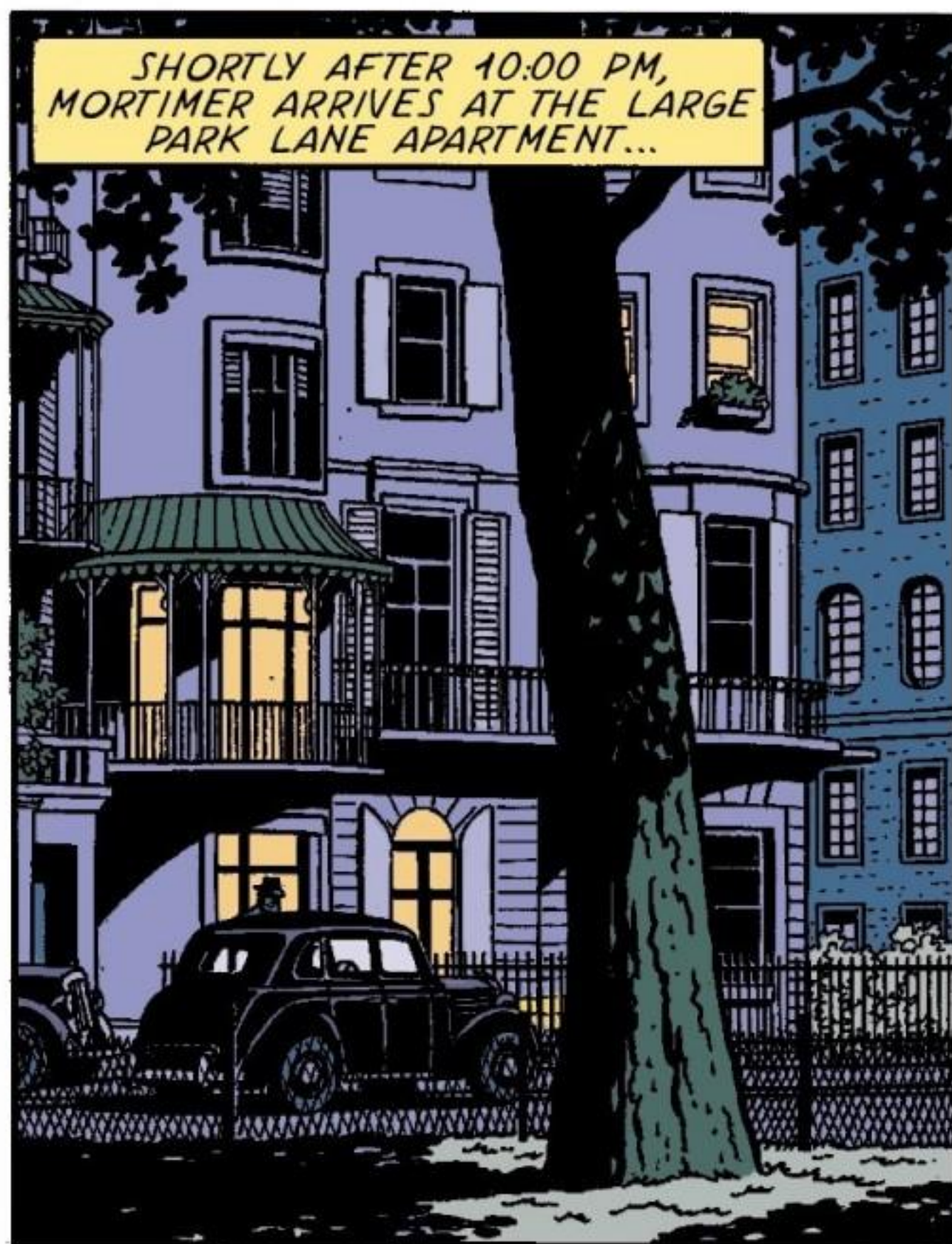
To Park Lane, please.

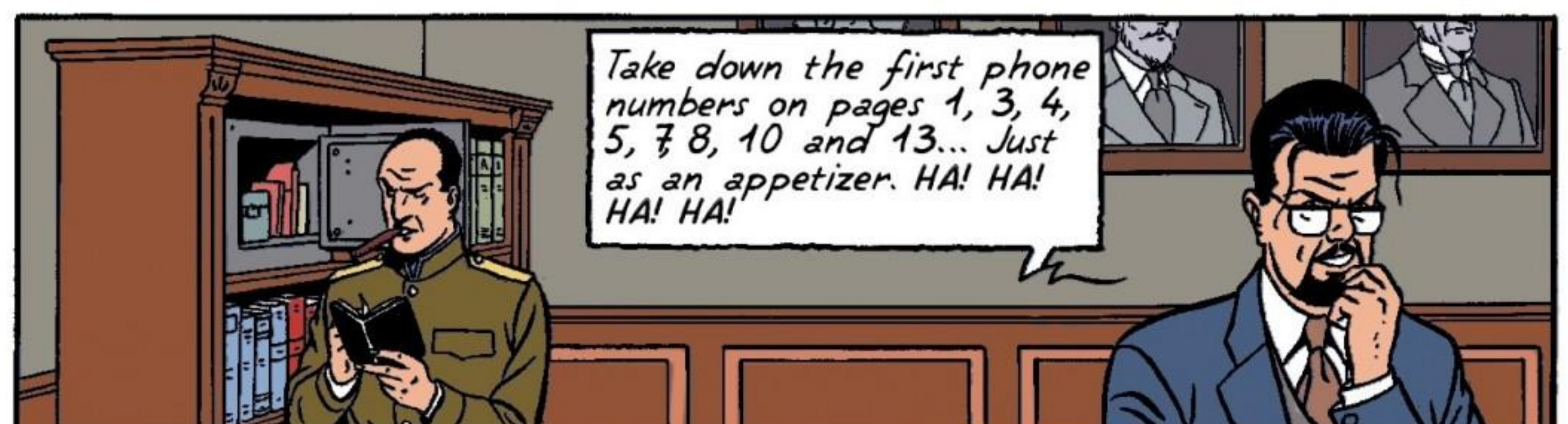
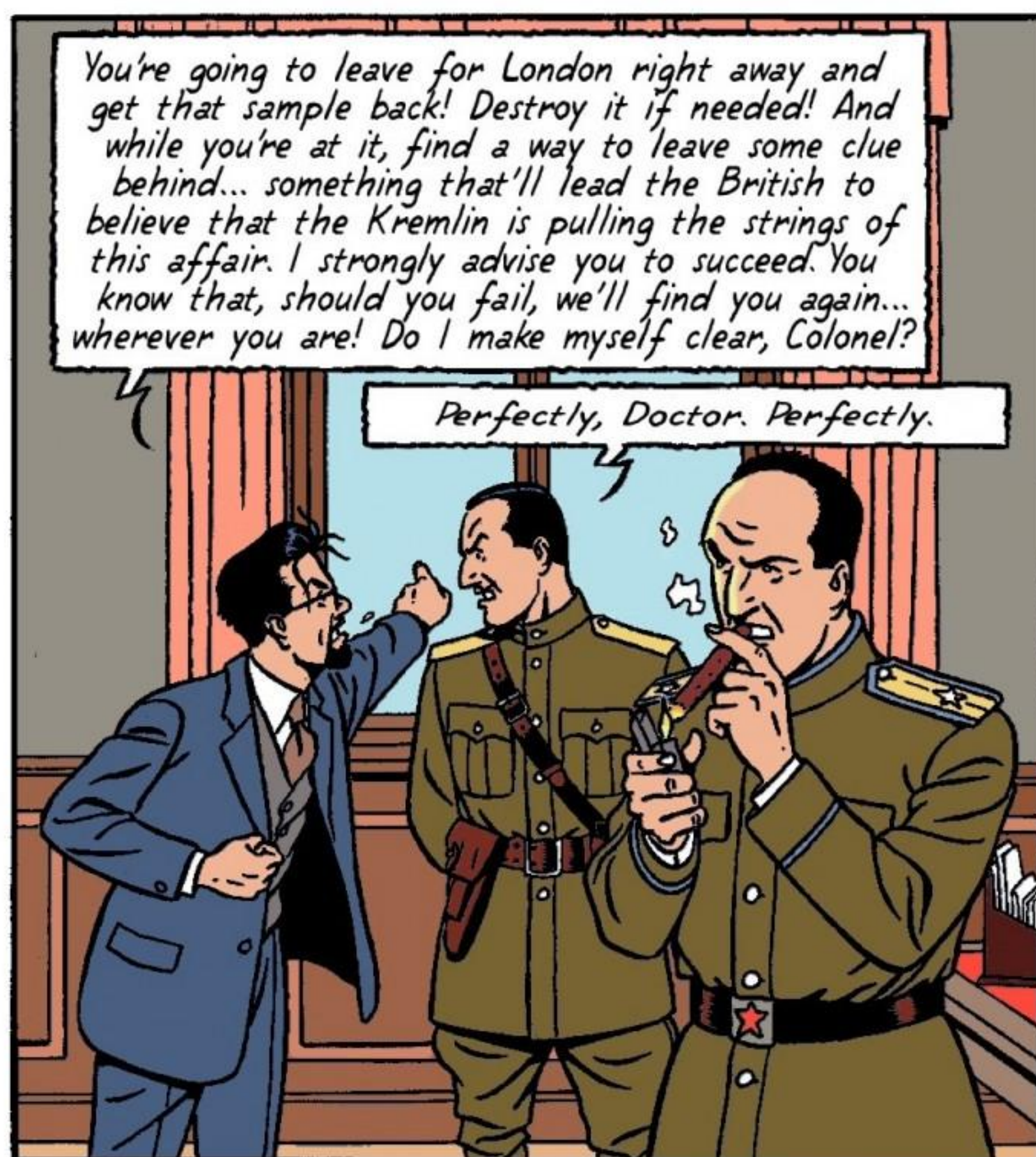
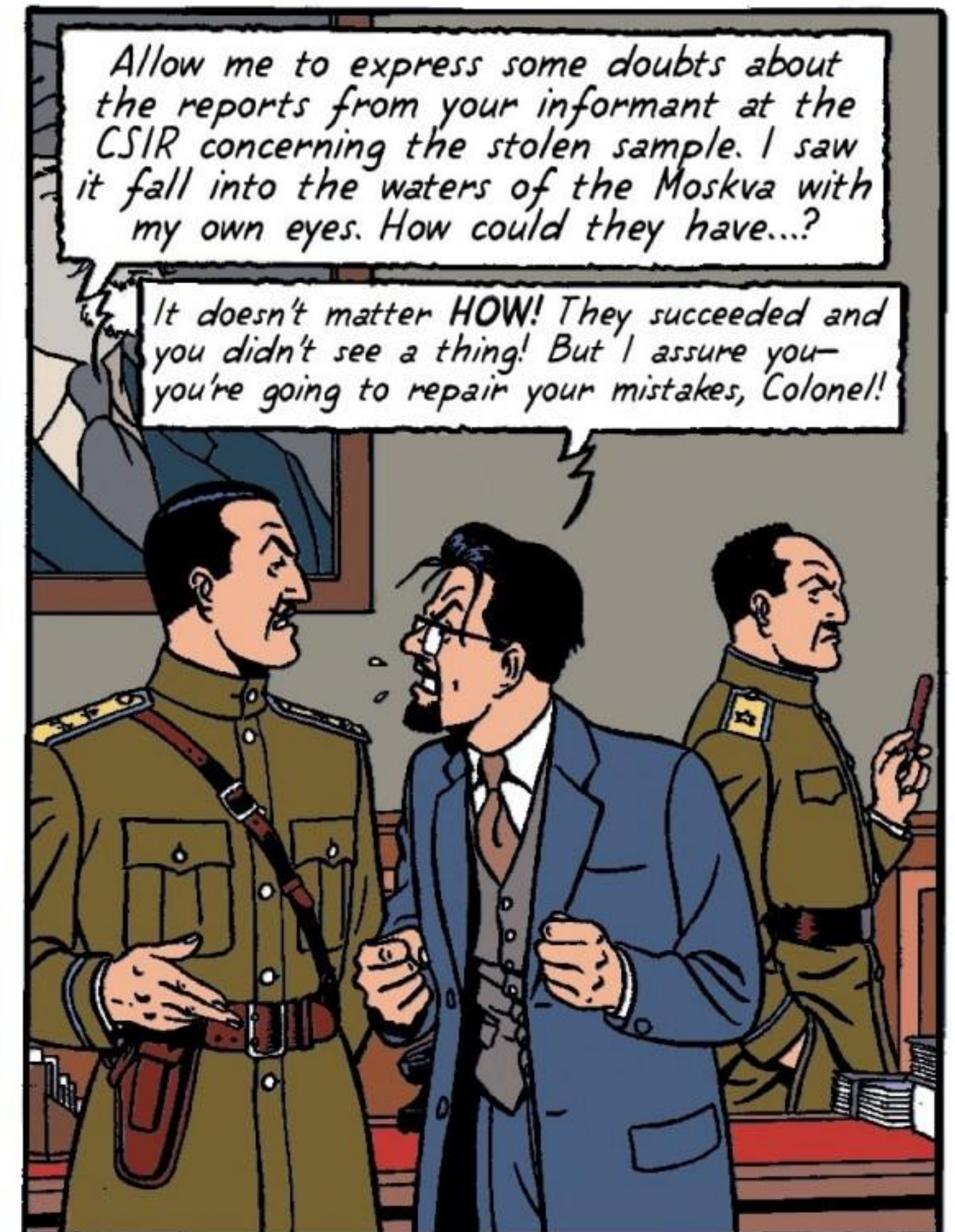
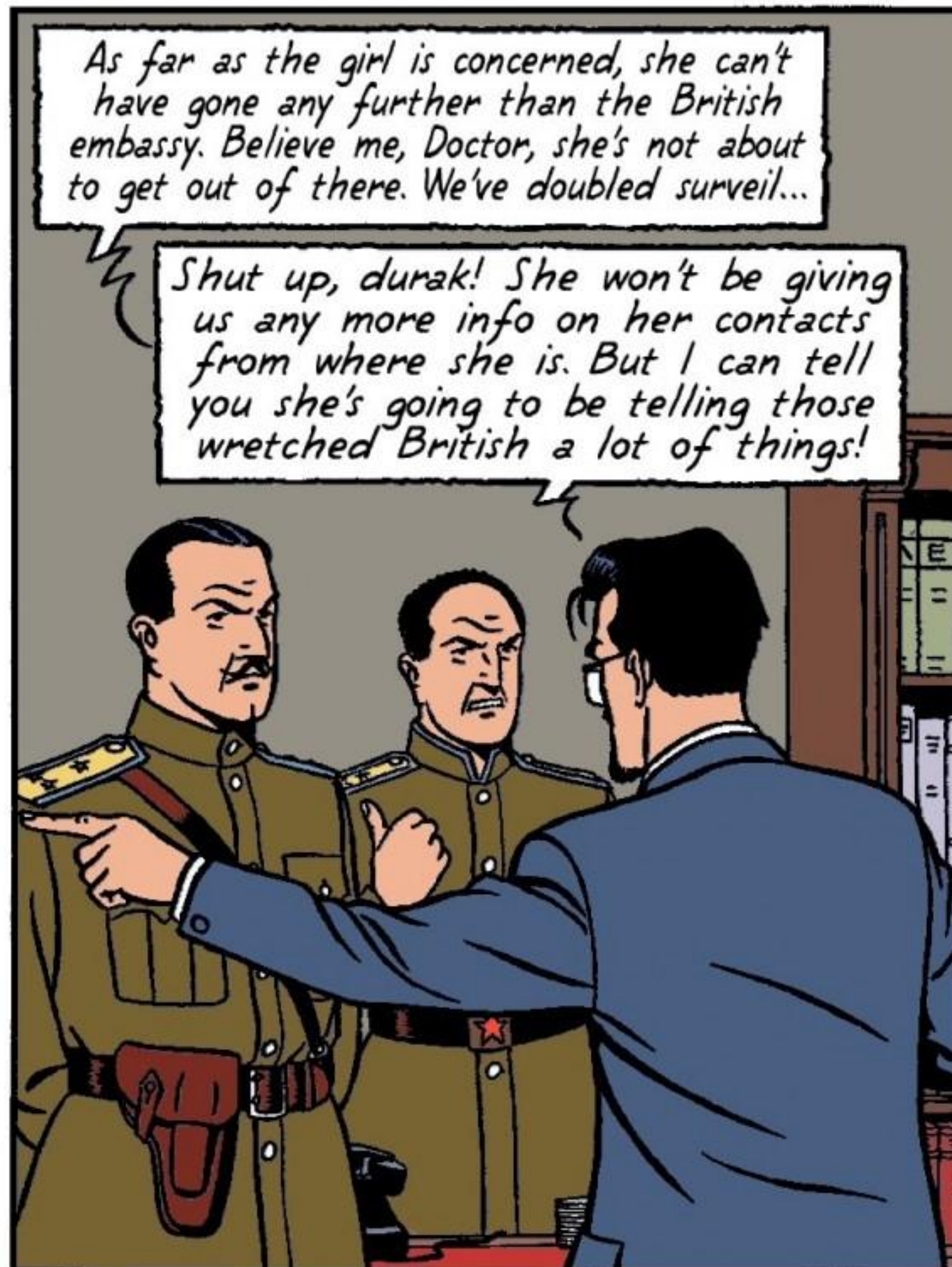
Yes, sir!



LESS THAN 10 MINUTES LATER, A SHADOW CREEPS INTO PROFESSOR MORTIMER'S OFFICE AND PICKS UP THE TELEPHONE.

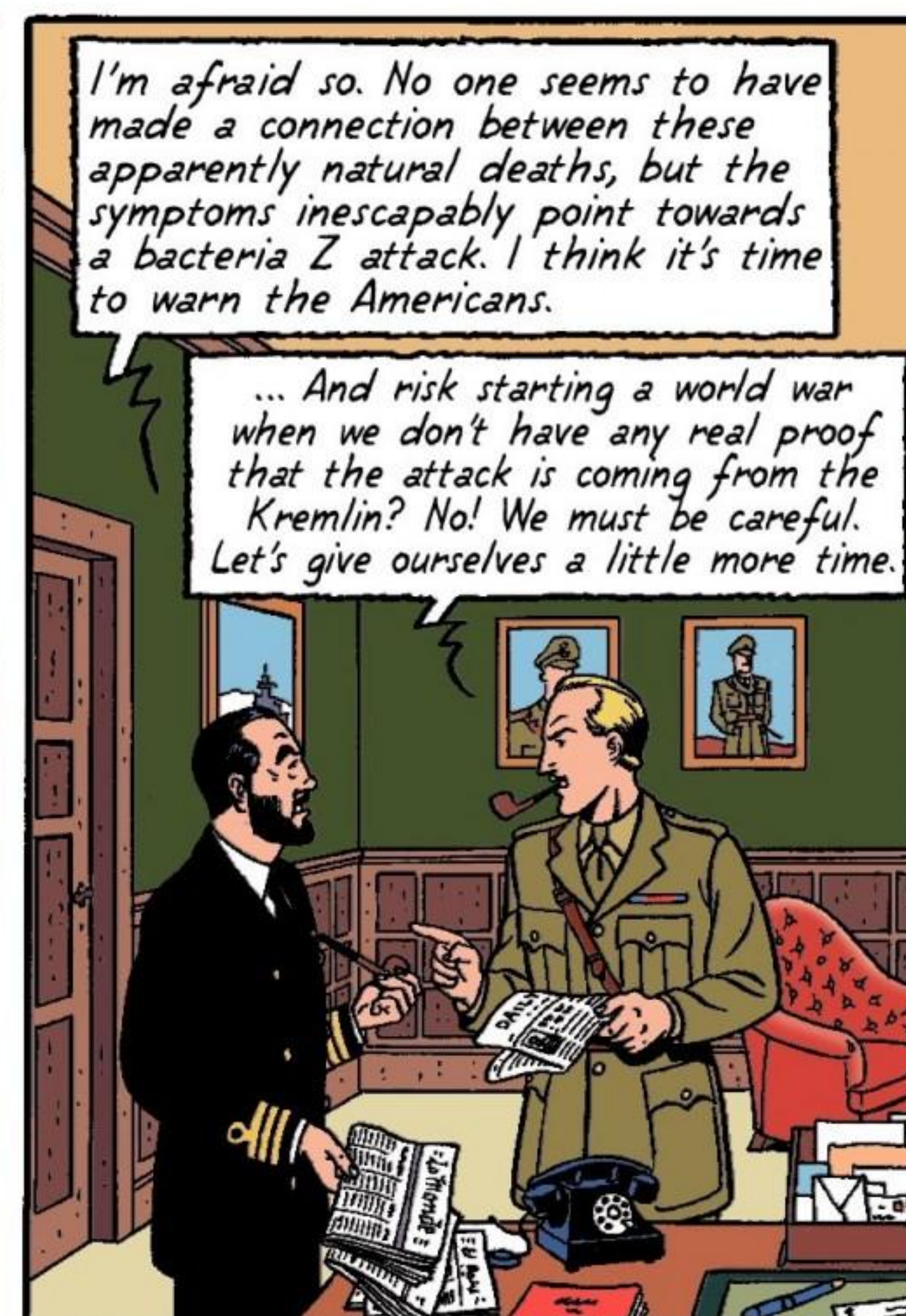
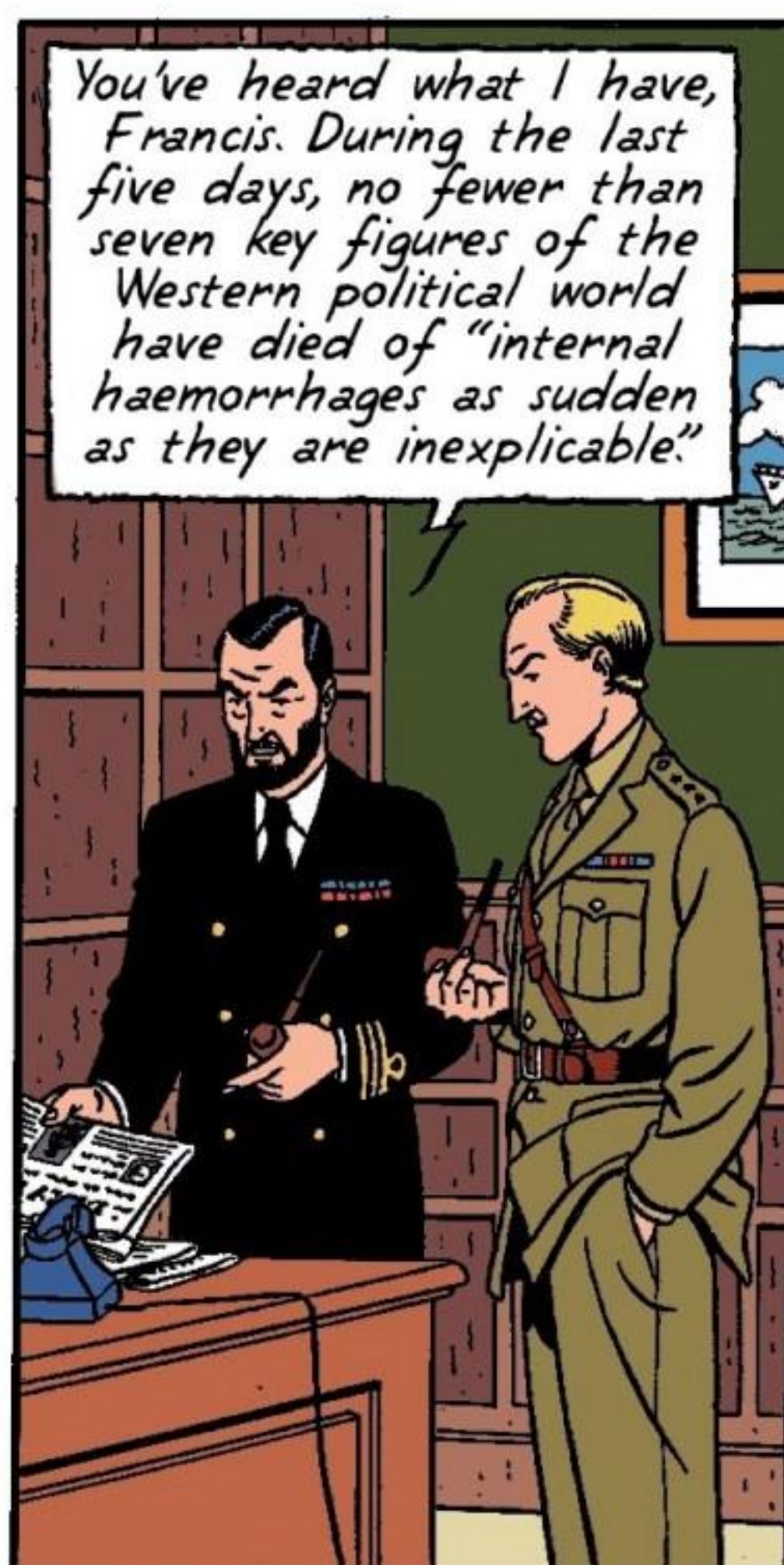
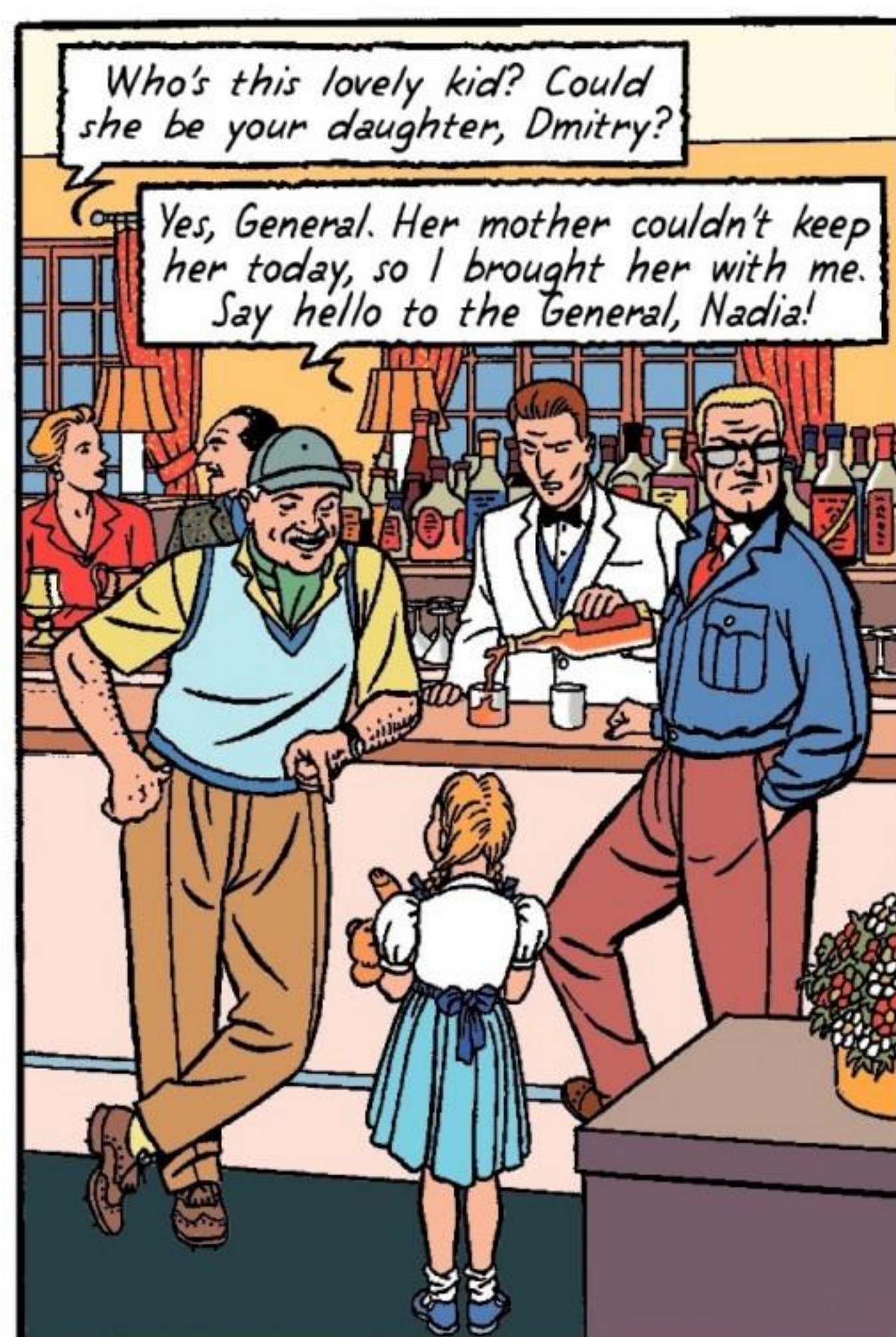
Hello?... Lab Mole to Red Bear... It's urgent!

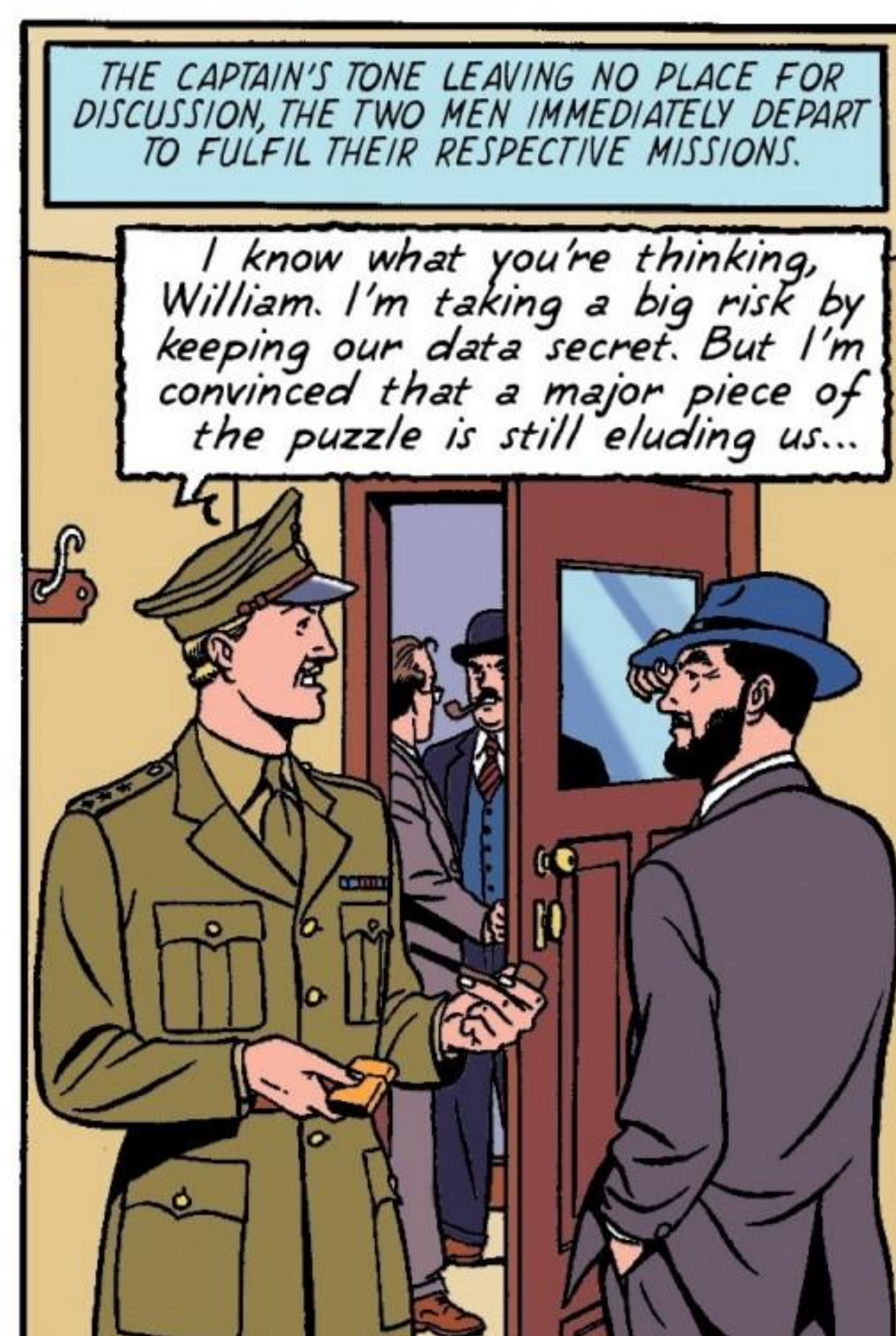
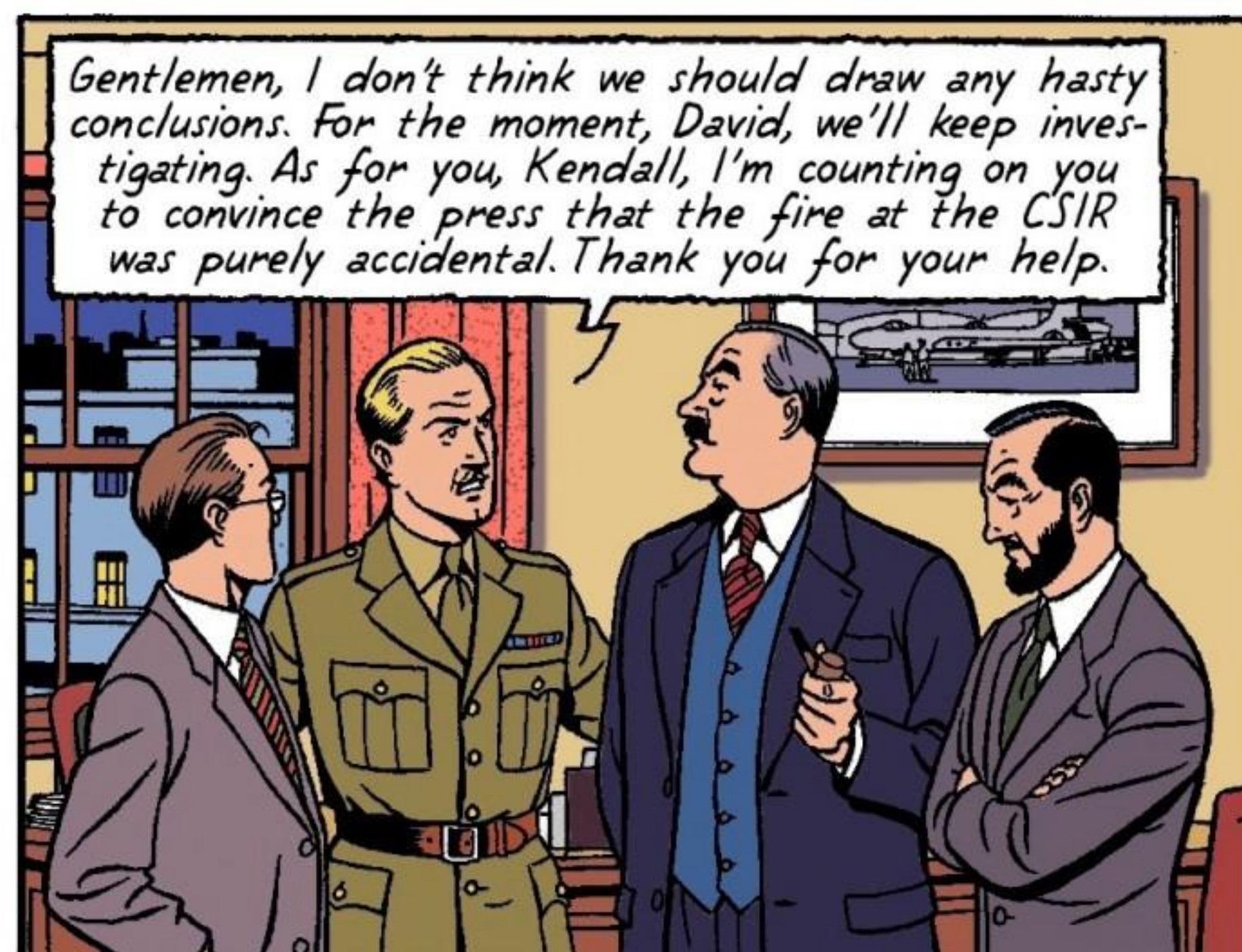
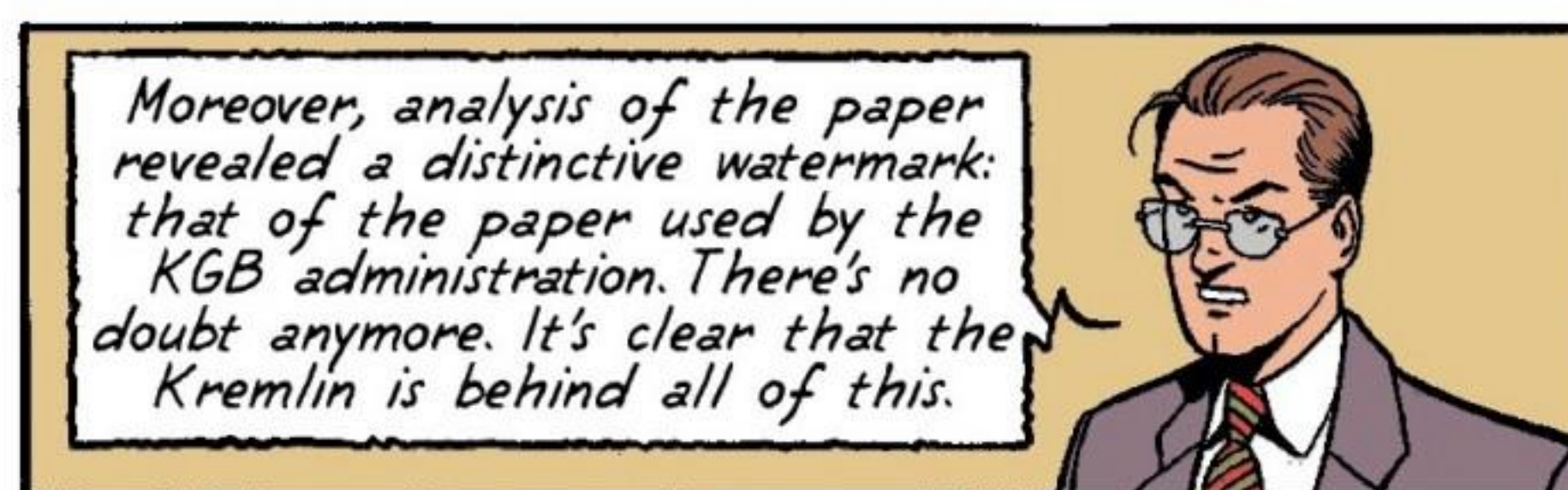
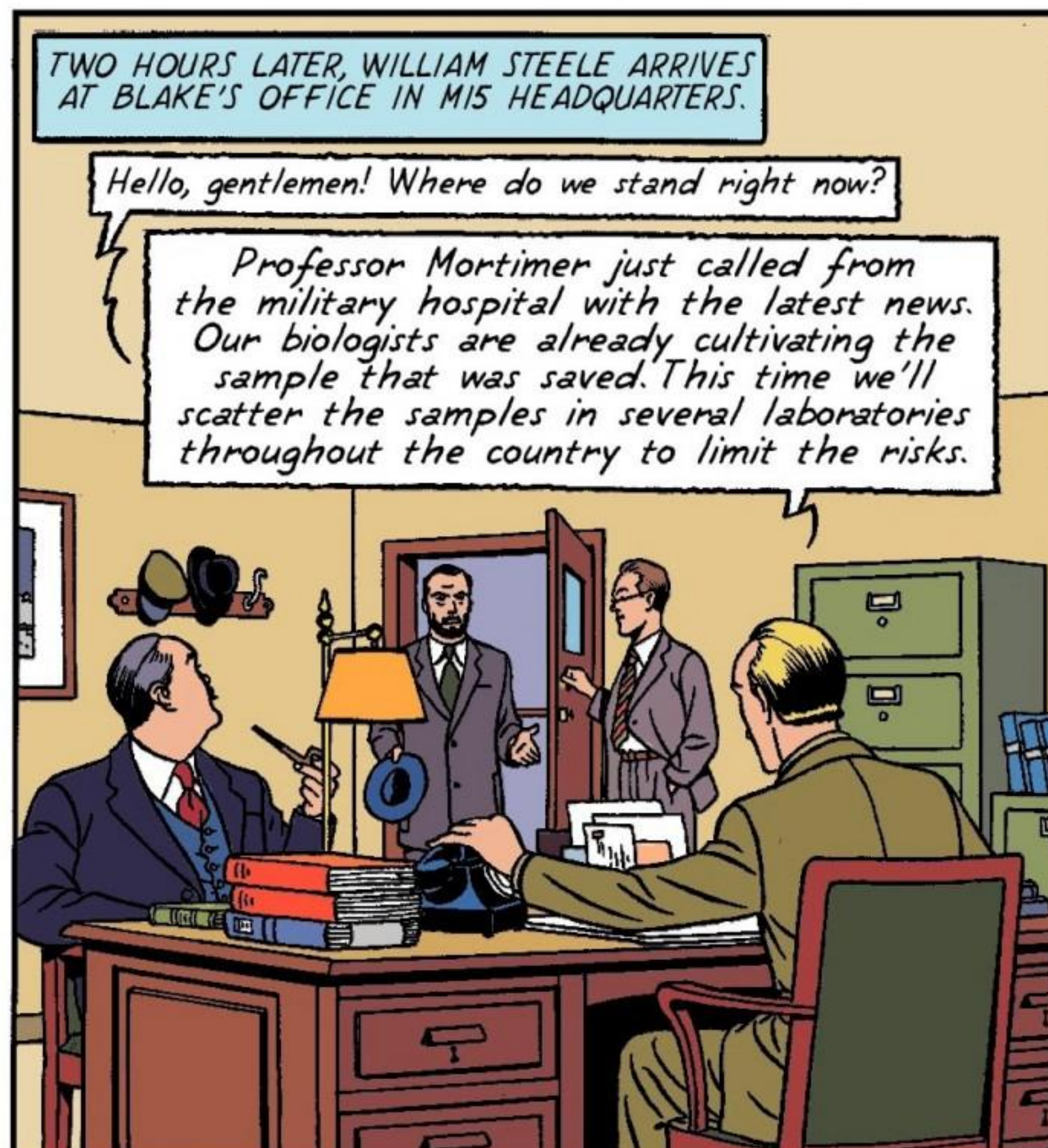
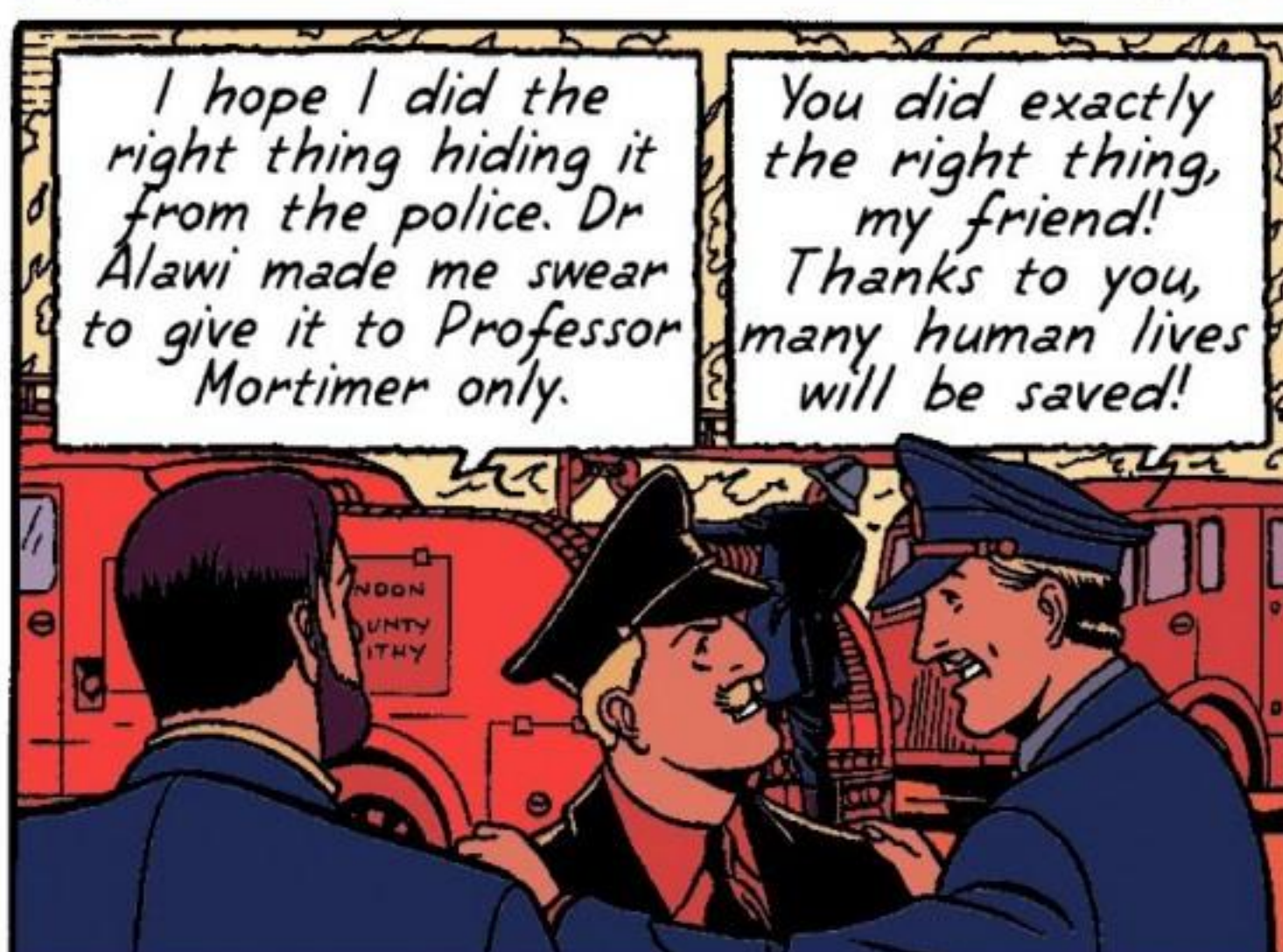
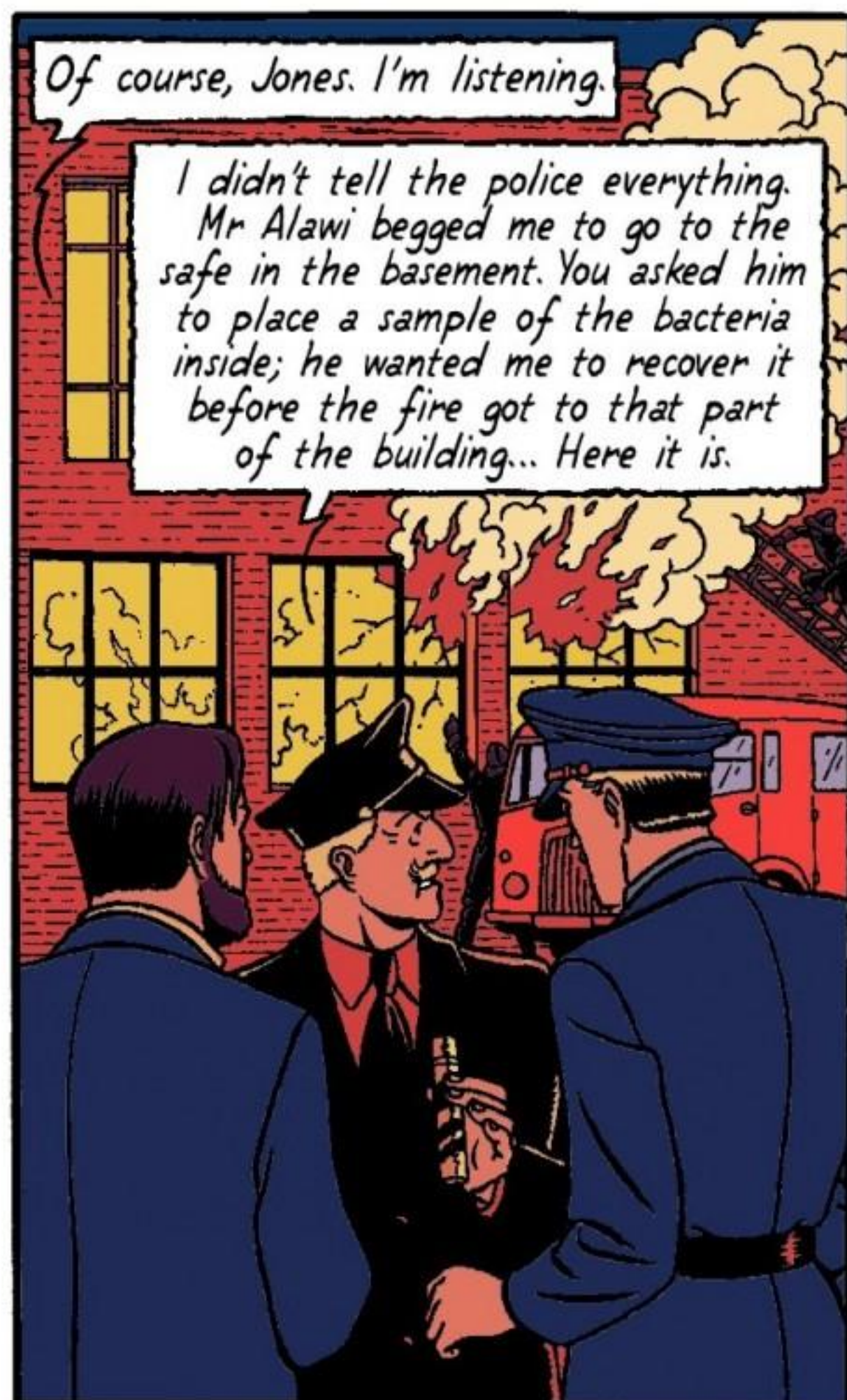


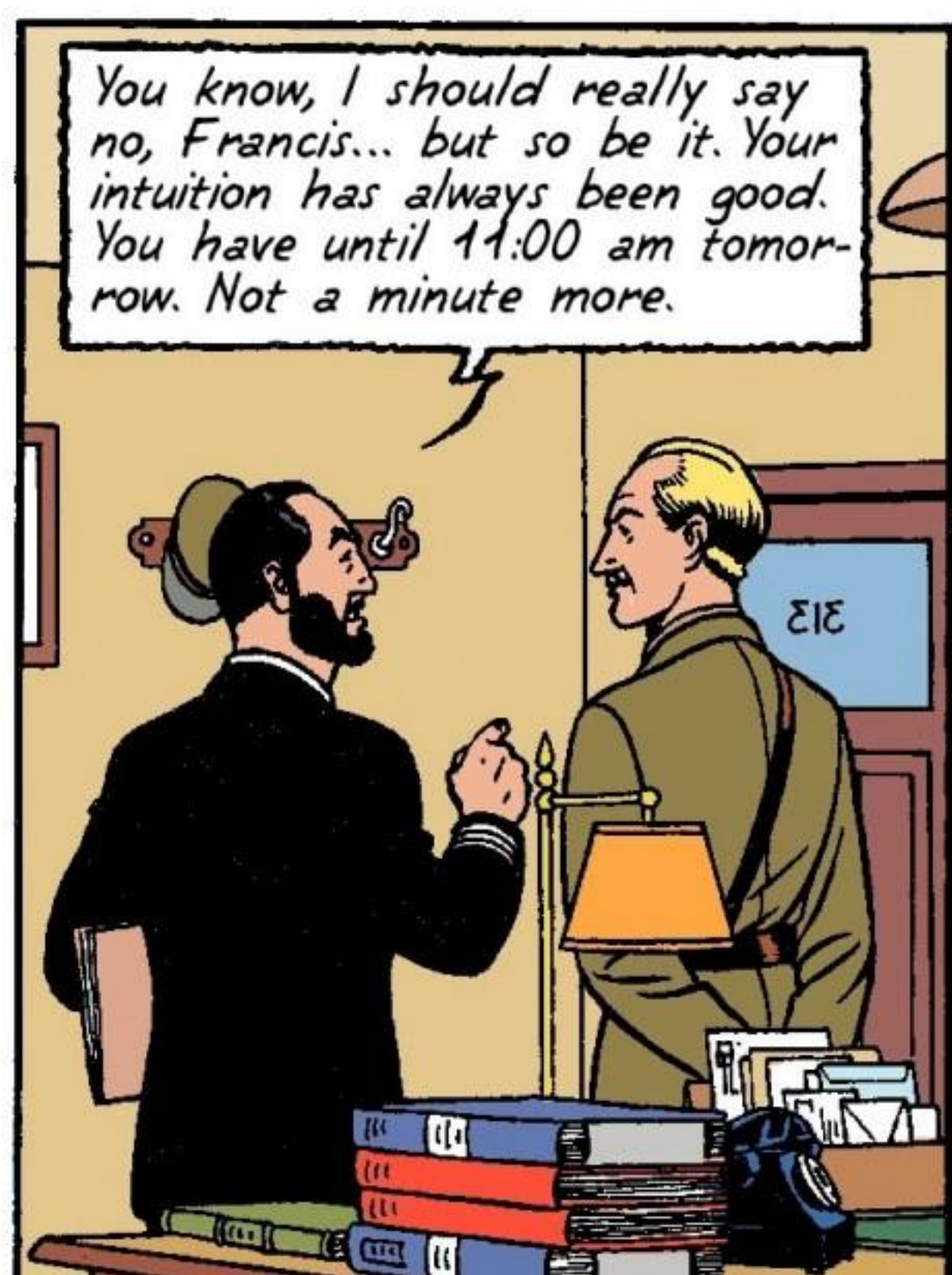
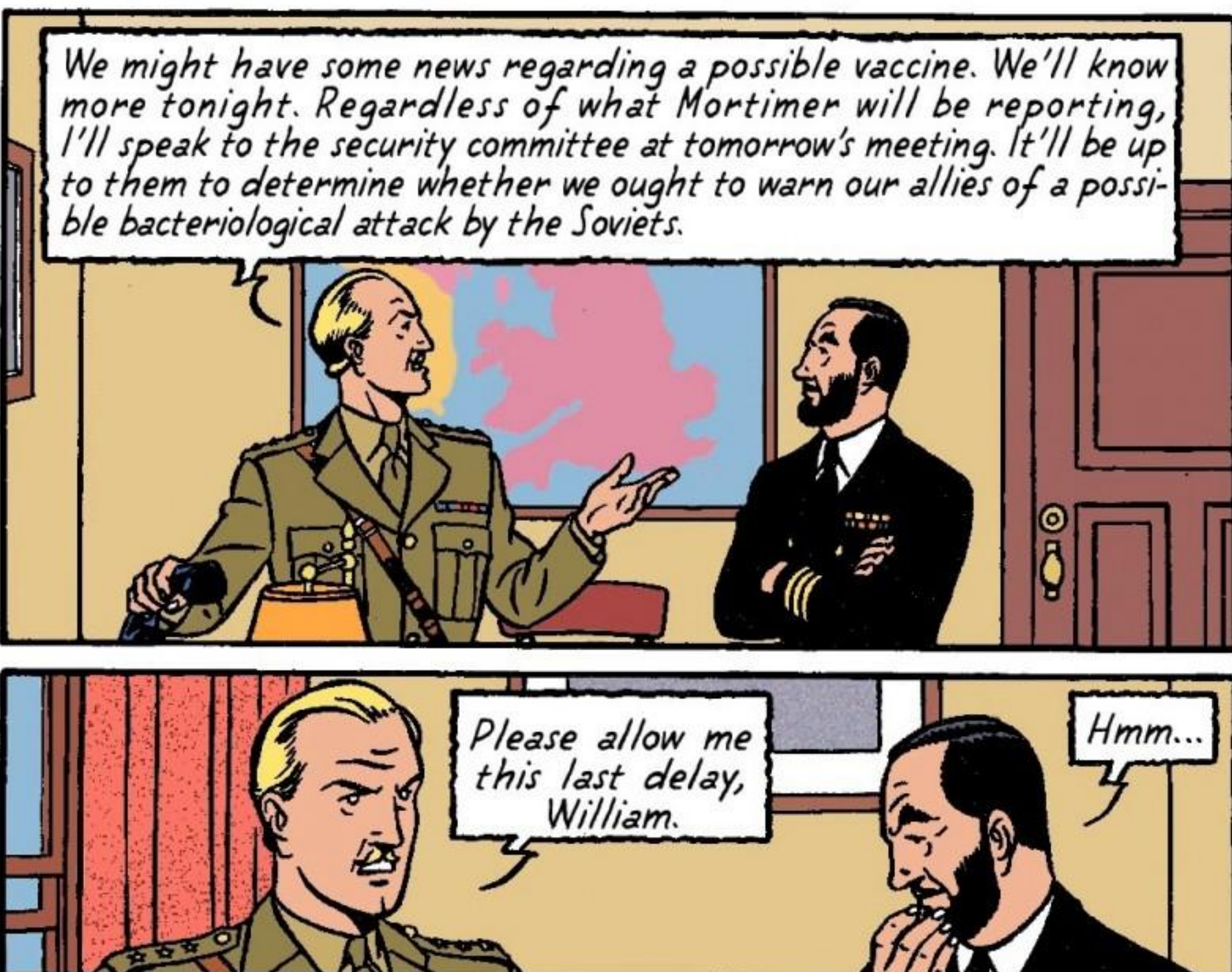
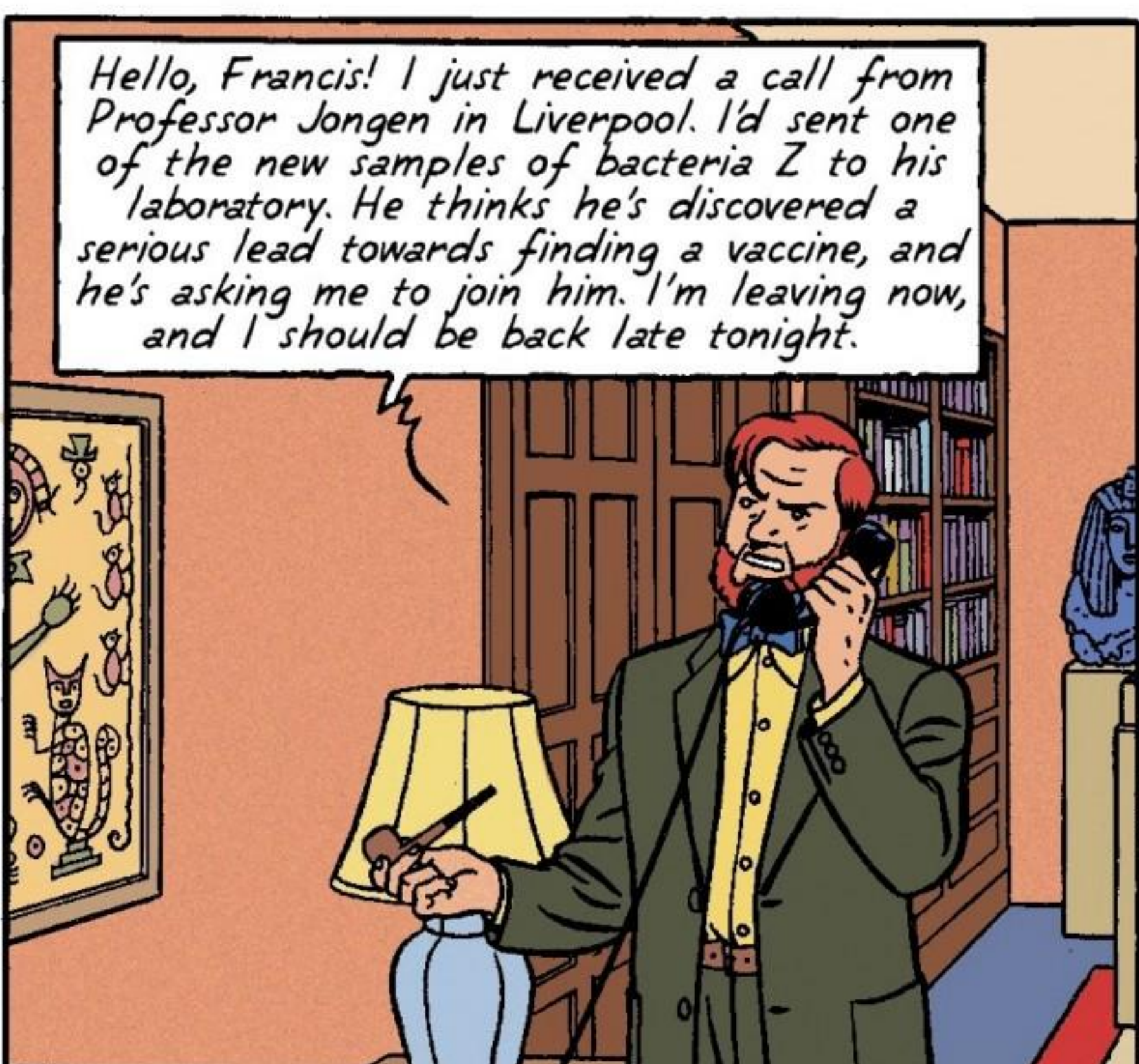
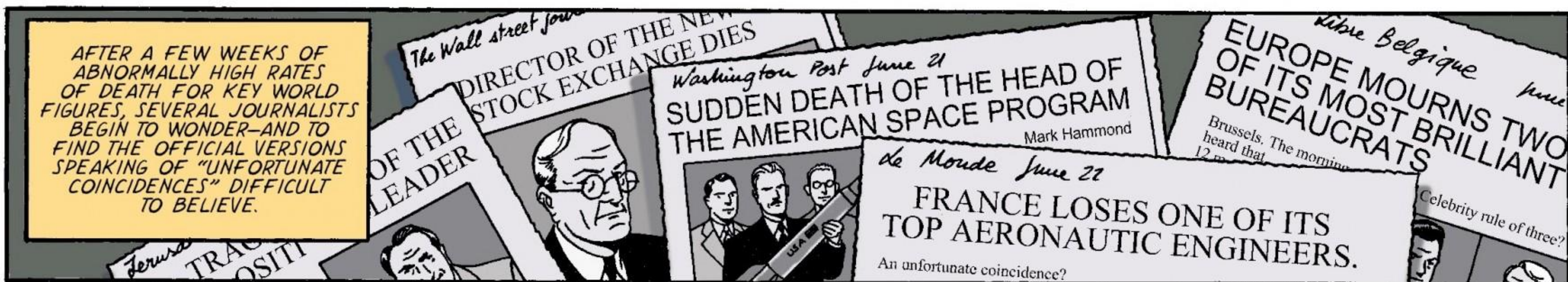


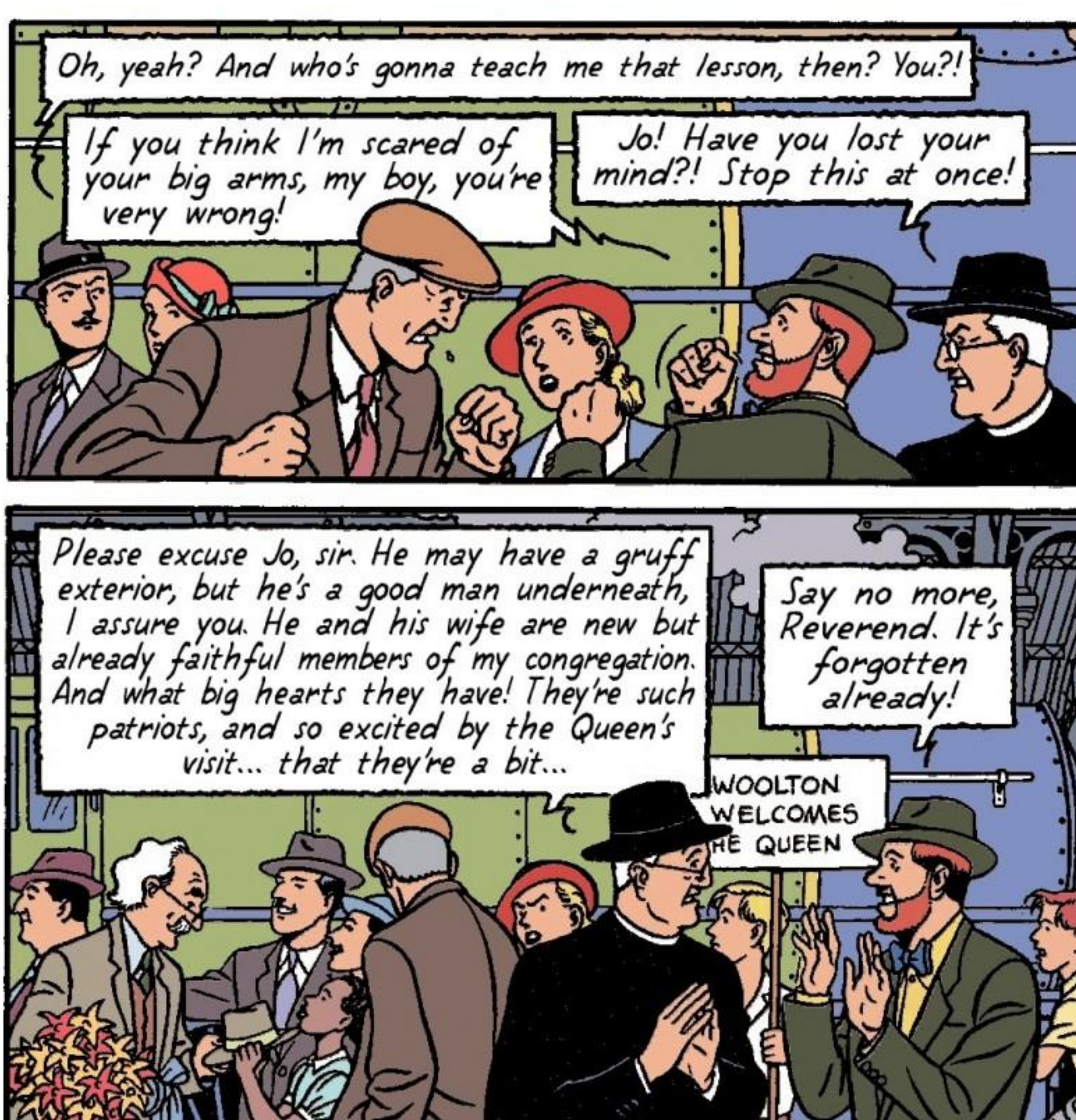
SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, IN SEVERAL PARTS OF THE WORLD CAREFULLY CHOSEN IN ADVANCE, TELEPHONES BEGIN TO RING IN NUMEROUS DWELLINGS, OTHERWISE UNREMARKABLE... BUT HOME TO DANGEROUS SLEEPER AGENTS IN DOCTOR VORONOV'S EMPLOY. AND SO, IN ROME, GENEVA, BRUSSELS, MADRID...

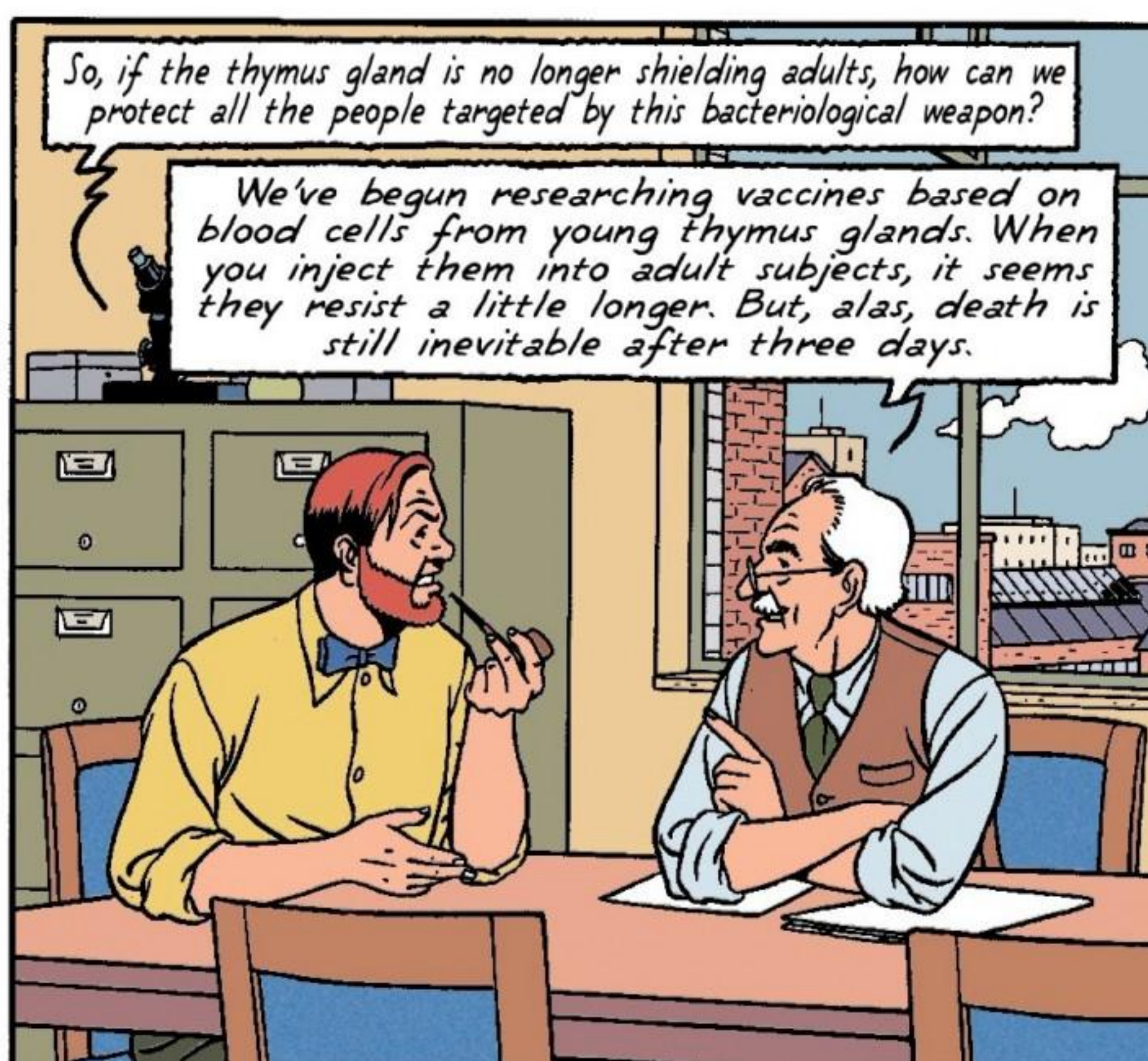
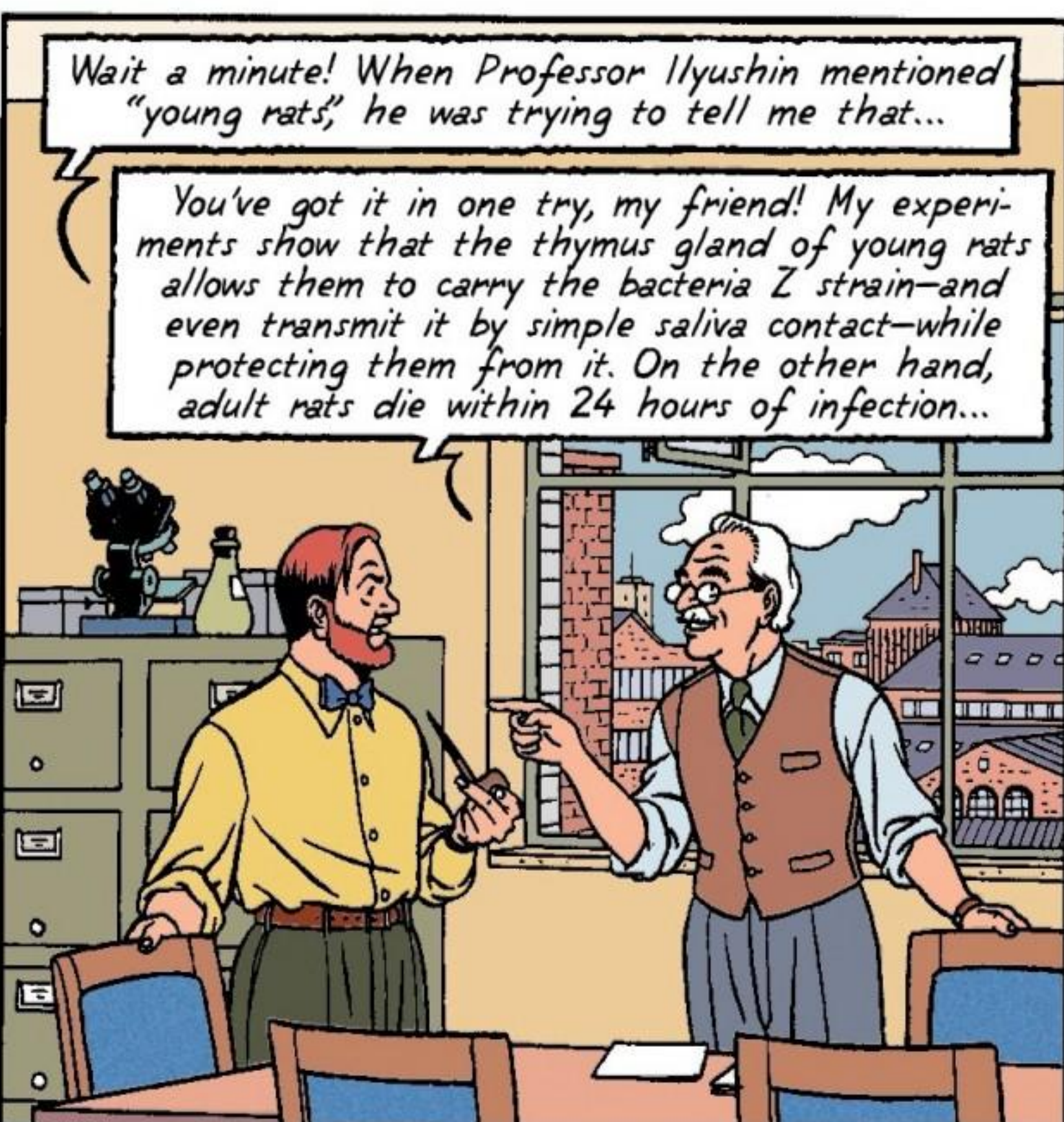
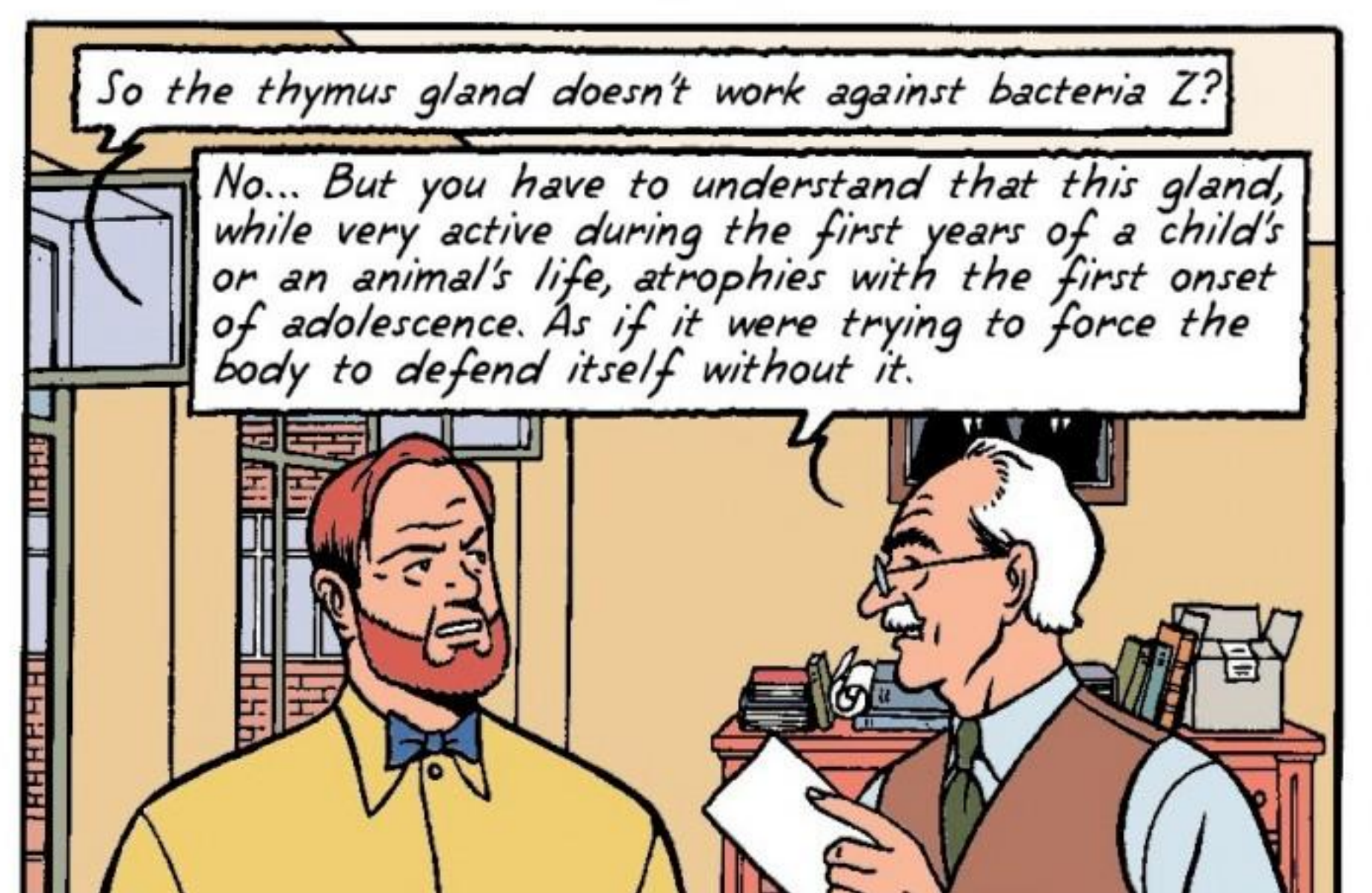
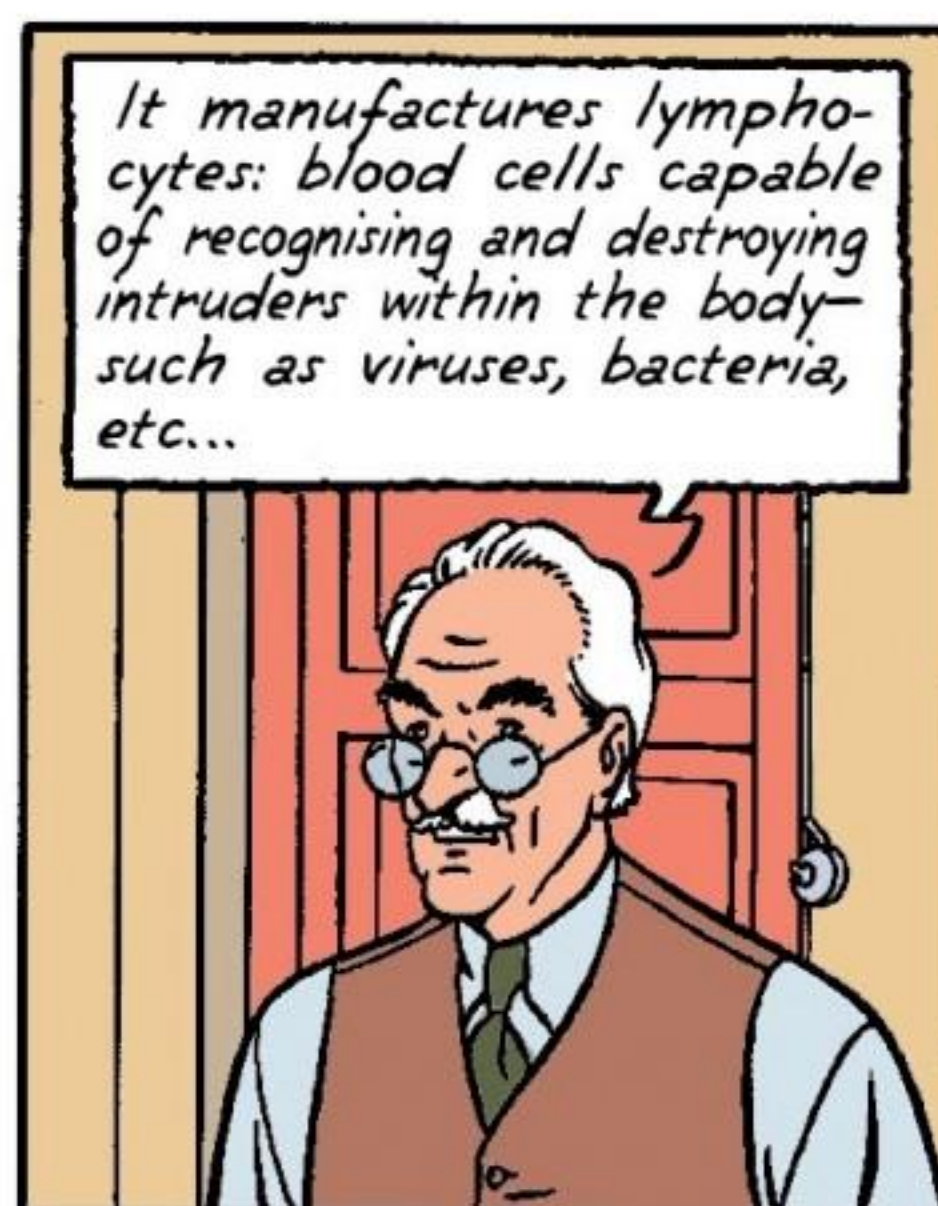












JUNE 26, 11:00 AM. AS AGREED, THE SECURITY COMMITTEE HAS GATHERED AT THE IS HEADQUARTERS IN ORDER TO HEAR OUT PROFESSOR MORTIMER.

Thank you for your explanations, Professor. One more question: What kind of timeframe do you envision for the success of this research?

A month?... Maybe two... We'll do our utmost. Displaying too much optimism would only be proof of a certain lack of scientific honesty, Colonel.

Gentlemen, we know what the threat is. You've also heard Captain Blake's theory on the risks of a world war if the Americans believe that the USSR has launched a bacteriological attack on the West. We can no longer wait and do nothing... So I suggest we warn our allies without further delay.

Please excuse my tardiness, gentlemen. I was waiting for these data here, which could prove crucial for our affair.

My Moscow section has let me know that three new deaths have been revealed within the Soviet leader's inner circle. They were two generals and an influential economic advisor...

Pardon me, Commander, but how does this relate to our business?

One of our agents managed to obtain confirmation that all three deaths were the result of sudden internal haemorrhages! Exactly the same symptoms as those of bacteria Z! And—what a coincidence—death struck three close allies of the Soviet leader as he attempts some small reforms to relax Communist rule! Don't you think that's a tad strange?

A troubling coincidence, indeed. But it doesn't prove anything!

Anyway, what does it change about the threat looming over us?

Good heavens! So that was it?!!!

What is it, Captain?

Gentlemen, you know that for several weeks now I've been convinced that something fundamental was eluding us in this affair. The Soviets are neither stupid nor suicidal. They know full well that a bacteriological attack against the West would quickly be discovered—and that it would be immediately countered by an American nuclear retaliation...

So let me ask you: Why arrest Ilyushin in the middle of an international conference? Why leave behind some fabric and a paper clearly implicating the KGB? Why offer us so many obvious clues? Why? So that we would believe in an attack ordered by the Kremlin!

Gentlemen, it's not the Americans we must warn of the danger. It's the Russians!... And quickly!

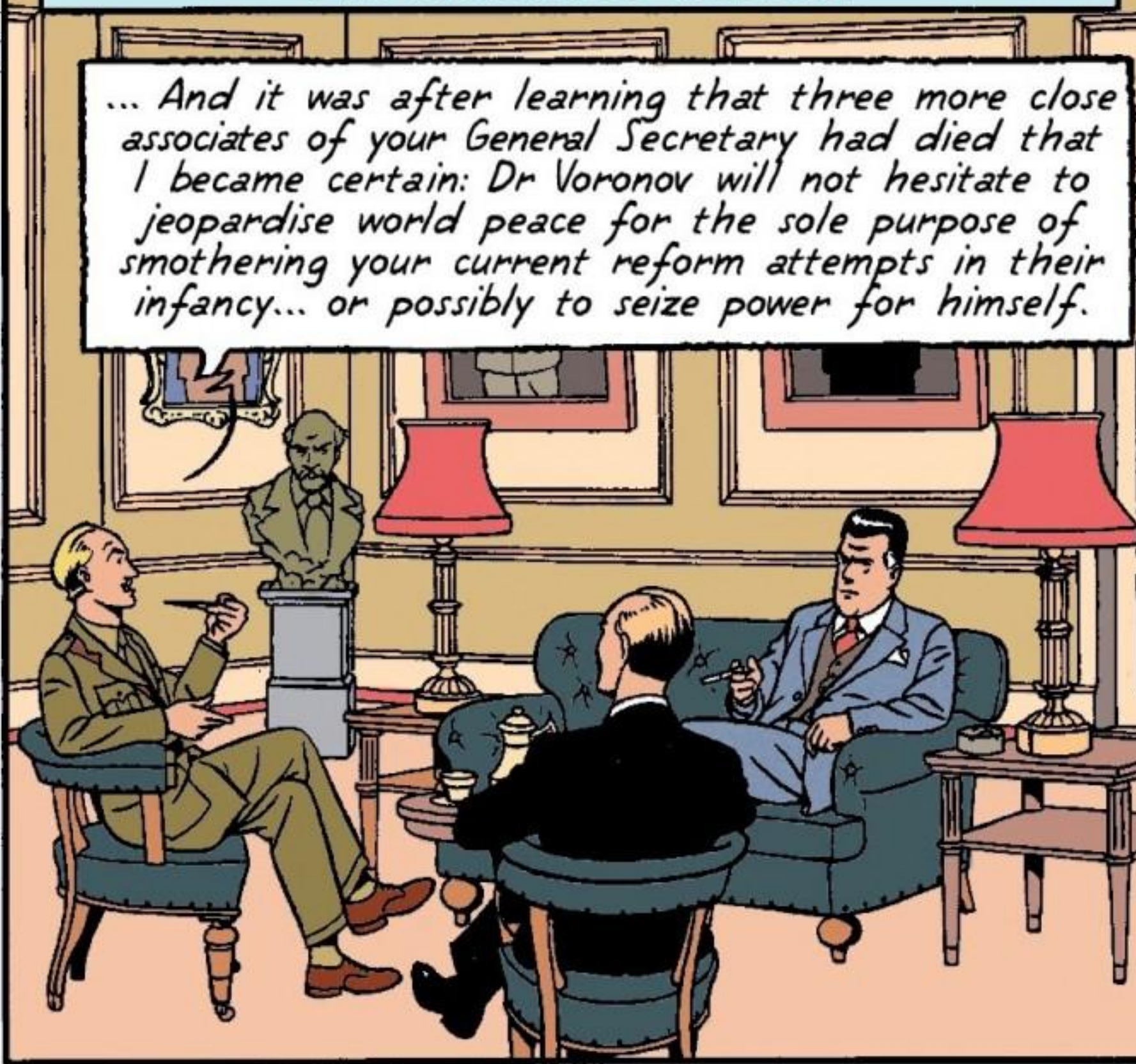
STUNNED BY CAPTAIN BLAKE'S REASONING AND THE HORRIBLE MACHINATION IT REVEALS, THE MEMBERS OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE'S SECURITY COMMITTEE FREEZE IN SILENCE—THAT PECULIAR SILENCE THAT ALL POWERFUL PEOPLE KNOW WELL: THAT WHICH PRECEDES A MOMENTOUS DECISION.

Commander Steele did tell me of a series of deaths among key Russian figures, two months ago. Today, the situation seems clear to me. Voronov is a nostalgic of the Stalin era—and he's going it alone! I'm certain now that he's preparing a putsch. Which is why he's attempting to destabilise the Kremlin by murdering its leaders and to weaken it abroad by pushing us into declaring war!

THREE DAYS LATER, LORD ARTHUR NORWICH HAS OBTAINED AN AUDIENCE AT THE SOVIET EMBASSY FOR THE HEAD OF MIS.



AT PRECISELY 10:00 AM, CAPTAIN BLAKE IS MET BY THE AMBASSADOR HIMSELF, ACCOMPANIED BY A KGB REPRESENTATIVE. IN A LITTLE UNDER AN HOUR, THE BRITON HAS FINISHED TELLING HIS STORY TO THE TWO STONE-FACED RUSSIANS.



... And it was after learning that three more close associates of your General Secretary had died that I became certain: Dr Voronov will not hesitate to jeopardise world peace for the sole purpose of smothering your current reform attempts in their infancy... or possibly to seize power for himself.

AFTER A HEAVY SILENCE FOLLOWING BLAKE'S CONCLUSION, THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KGB SPEAKS UP IN A VOICE THAT CLEARLY BETRAYS HIS ANIMOSITY.



If I understand you correctly, Captain... You've come here to tell us calmly that you have spies in our country; that you yourself are back from an illegal mission on our soil; and that after your fantastic adventures, you have reached the conclusion that we must now clean up our own backyard!...

Your words are insulting! They were also recorded—and your admission gives us the right to demand reparations! What proof do we have that...



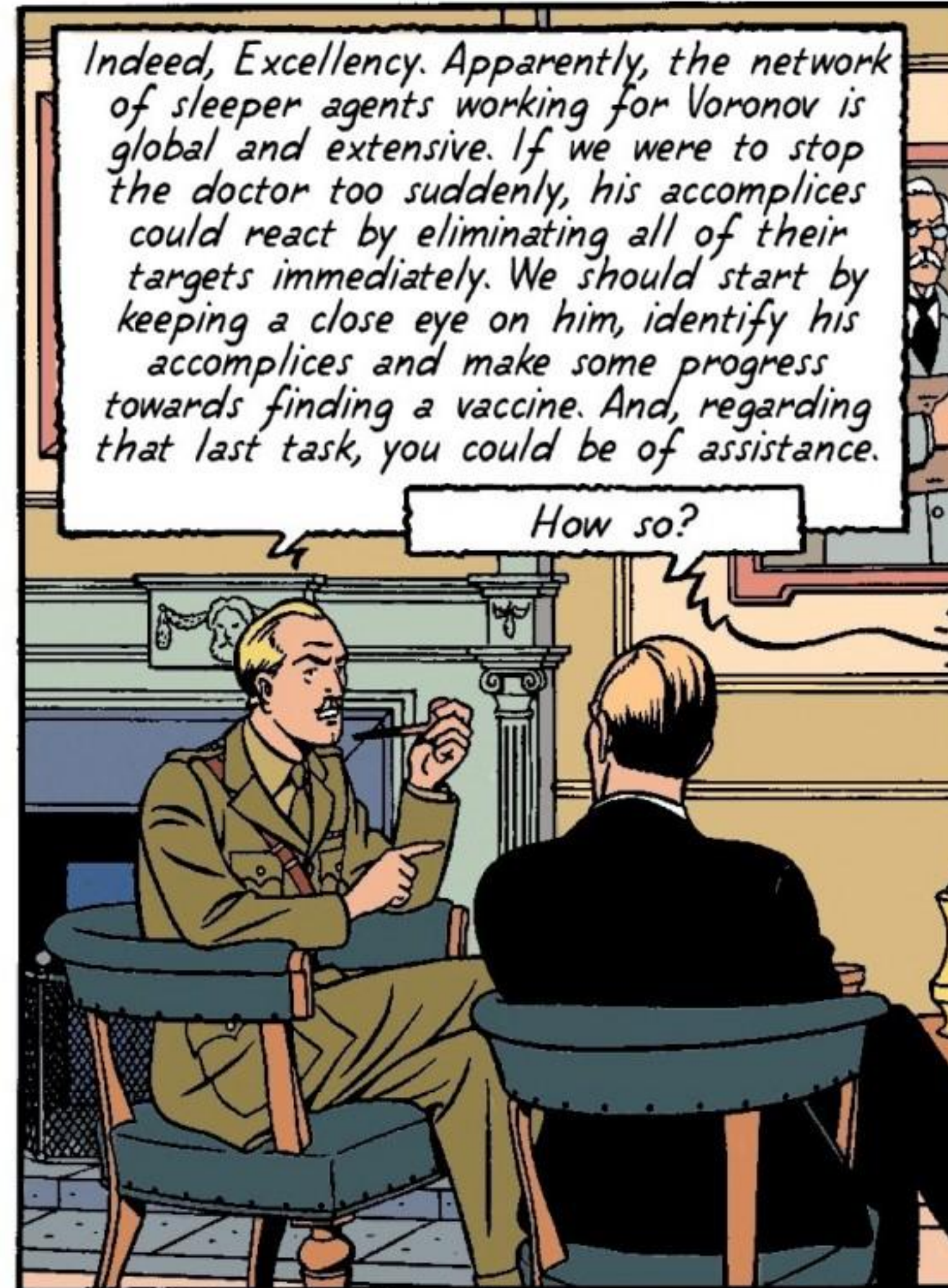
Be quiet, Major Varich!

I give you my word as an officer that I'm not hiding anything from you, Excellency. My approach is very unusual in the current political context, and I understand the major's mistrust. That said, there are traitors in both camps, and we must prevent them from using the tensions between East and West to attain their own personal goals.



I imagine you came to us with a proposal?

Indeed, Excellency. Apparently, the network of sleeper agents working for Voronov is global and extensive. If we were to stop the doctor too suddenly, his accomplices could react by eliminating all of their targets immediately. We should start by keeping a close eye on him, identify his accomplices and make some progress towards finding a vaccine. And, regarding that last task, you could be of assistance.



How so?

Please excuse the major, Captain Blake. The Cold War is making our security people paranoid. As for you, Major: Sit down. Don't forget that you're in MY office!



Our investigations have revealed that all deaths—yours as well as ours—share a common characteristic. They always occur 24 hours after a public appearance of the victim. Now, these 24 hours are precisely the time bacteria Z need to kill a person. So, we'd need to obtain as many images as possible of these last public appearances to try and discover how the sleeper agents manage to infect their targets with the bacteria!

Excellent analysis, Captain. We will investigate and provide you with what we can.



I thank you, Excellency. As for the rest, I suggest your General Secretary himself warn the Americans about the situation. Not only will the gesture engender trust between you, but, more importantly, I believe that it is only together that we can fight this scourge.

Wise words, Captain. I'll call Moscow right away.



A LITTLE LATER...

I will respect the truce, Captain... But you can count on me to reinforce surveillance on your embassy in Moscow. Comrade Wardynska isn't going to leave the Soviet Union any time soon!



You know what we say in Britain, Major...

"... Never say never..."

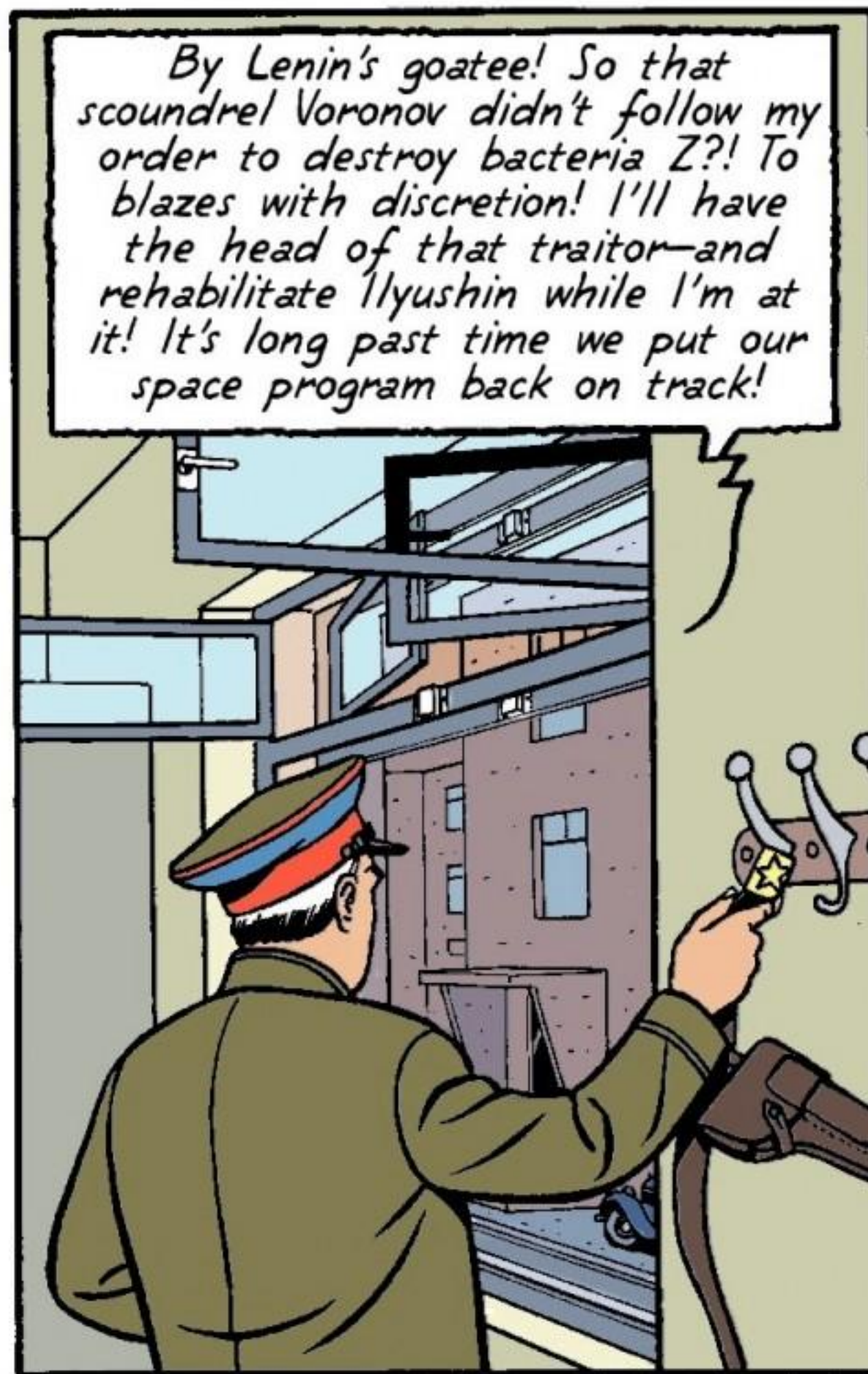




... Yes, comrade... I understand...



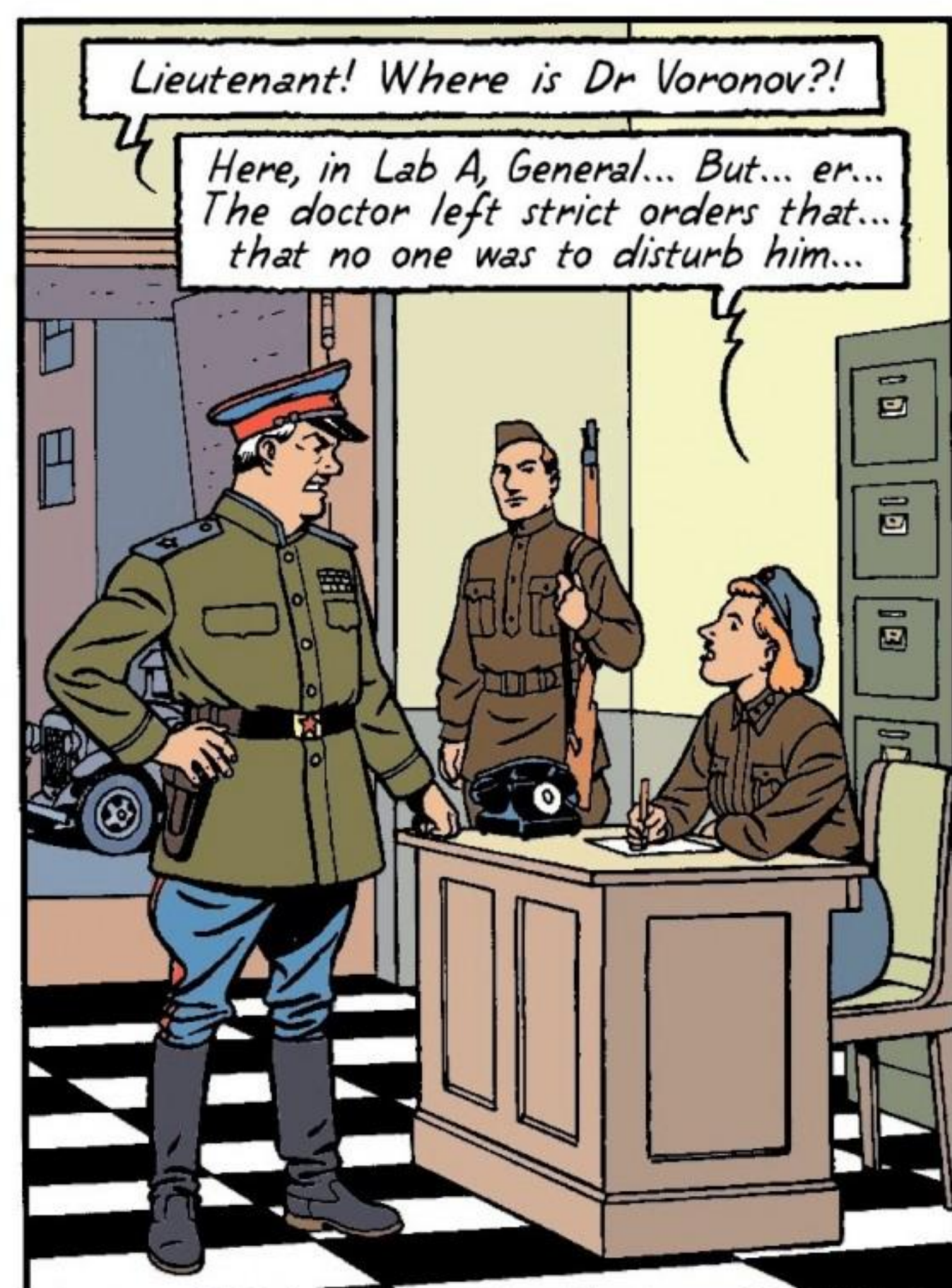
... I must be discreet... You can count on me. I'll keep you informed personally... Goodbye, comrade.



By Lenin's goatee! So that scoundrel Voronov didn't follow my order to destroy bacteria Z?! To blazes with discretion! I'll have the head of that traitor—and rehabilitate Ilyushin while I'm at it! It's long past time we put our space program back on track!

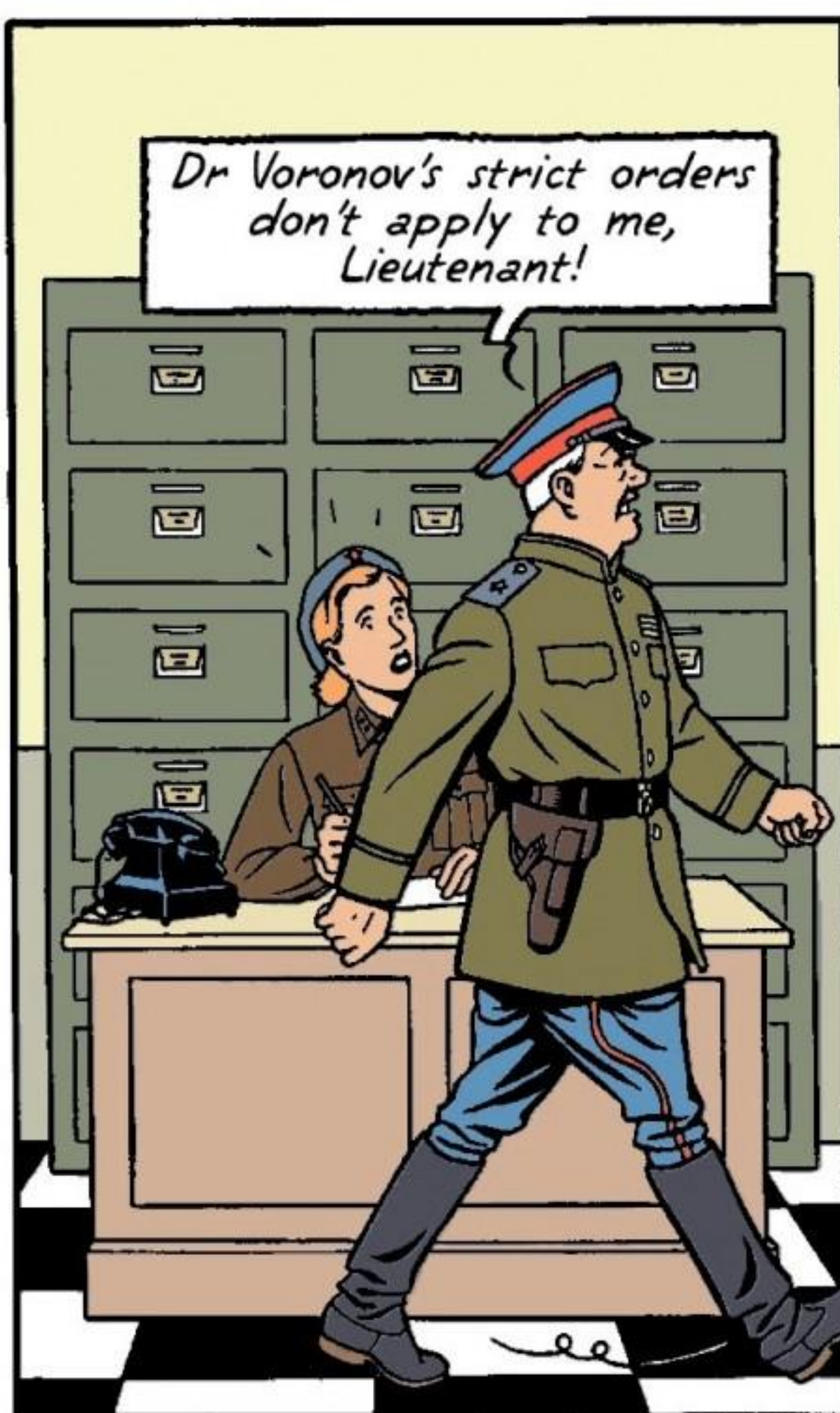


MOMENTS LATER, GENERAL UFA HEADS TOWARDS THE KGB HOSPITAL; ON HIS FACE IS THE EXPRESSION THAT THE SOLDIERS SERVING UNDER HIM HAVE LEARNED TO DREAD.



Lieutenant! Where is Dr Voronov?!

Here, in Lab A, General... But... er... The doctor left strict orders that... that no one was to disturb him...



Dr Voronov's strict orders don't apply to me, Lieutenant!



Dr Voronov! General Ufa just forced his way in despite your orders. He wants to see you without delay.



Hmm... Not a problem. Just make sure that the general comes in through door E. You'll close the door behind him... and lock it!



General! Wait for me! I just spoke to Dr Voronov! He agreed to see you!

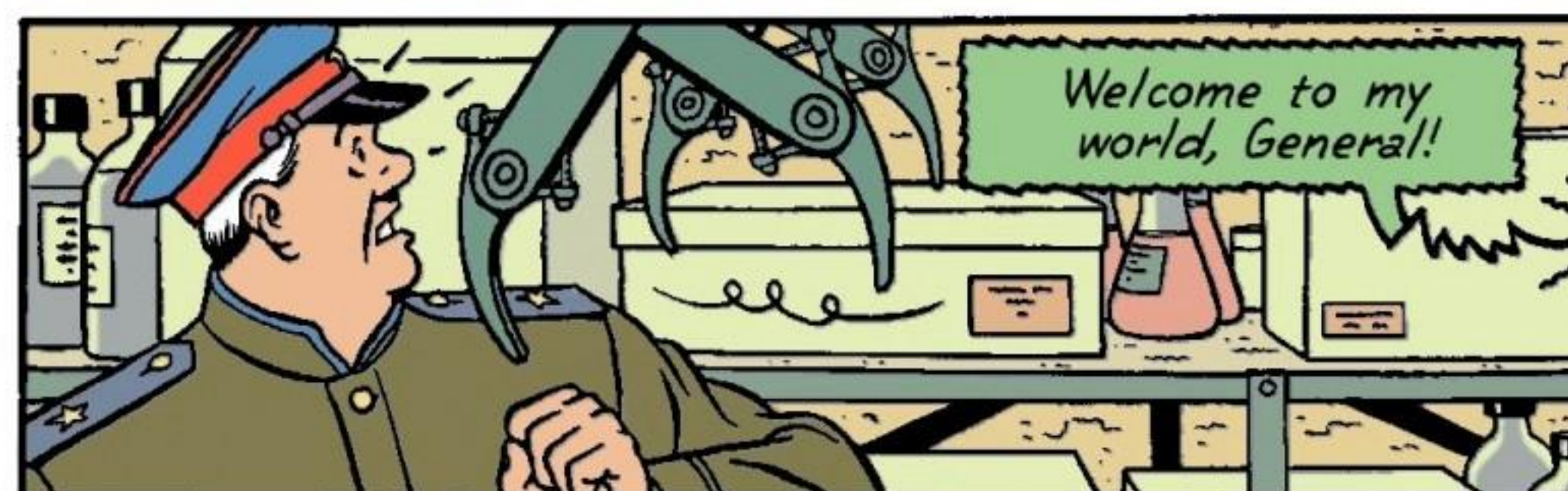
ЕГБ АВА



This way, General. The doctor is working on this side of the laboratory.



DZEEEEEE ? DZEEEEEE



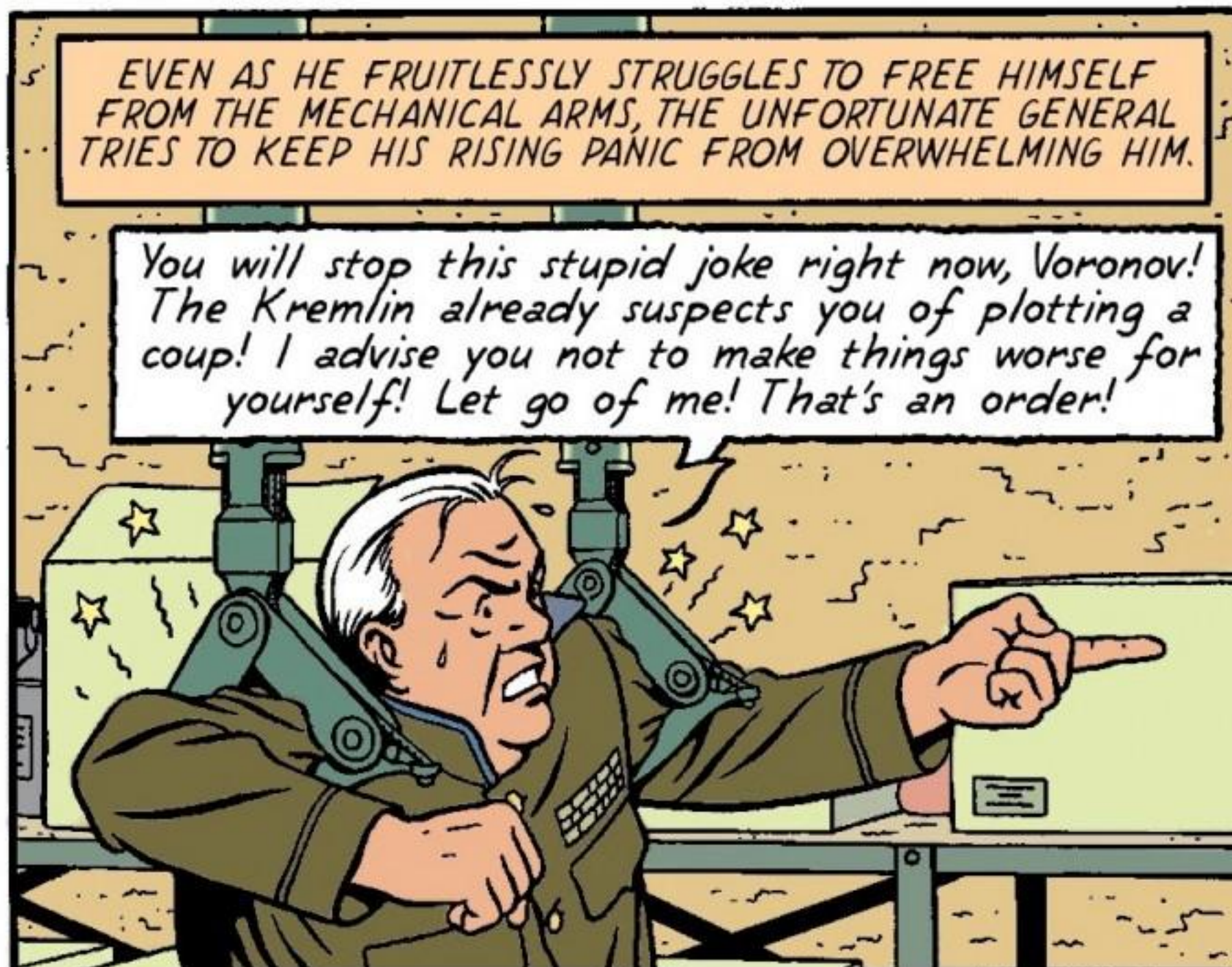
Welcome to my world, General!!



Here, everything is handled with extreme care—even you, general!

DZEEEEEEEEEE

?!

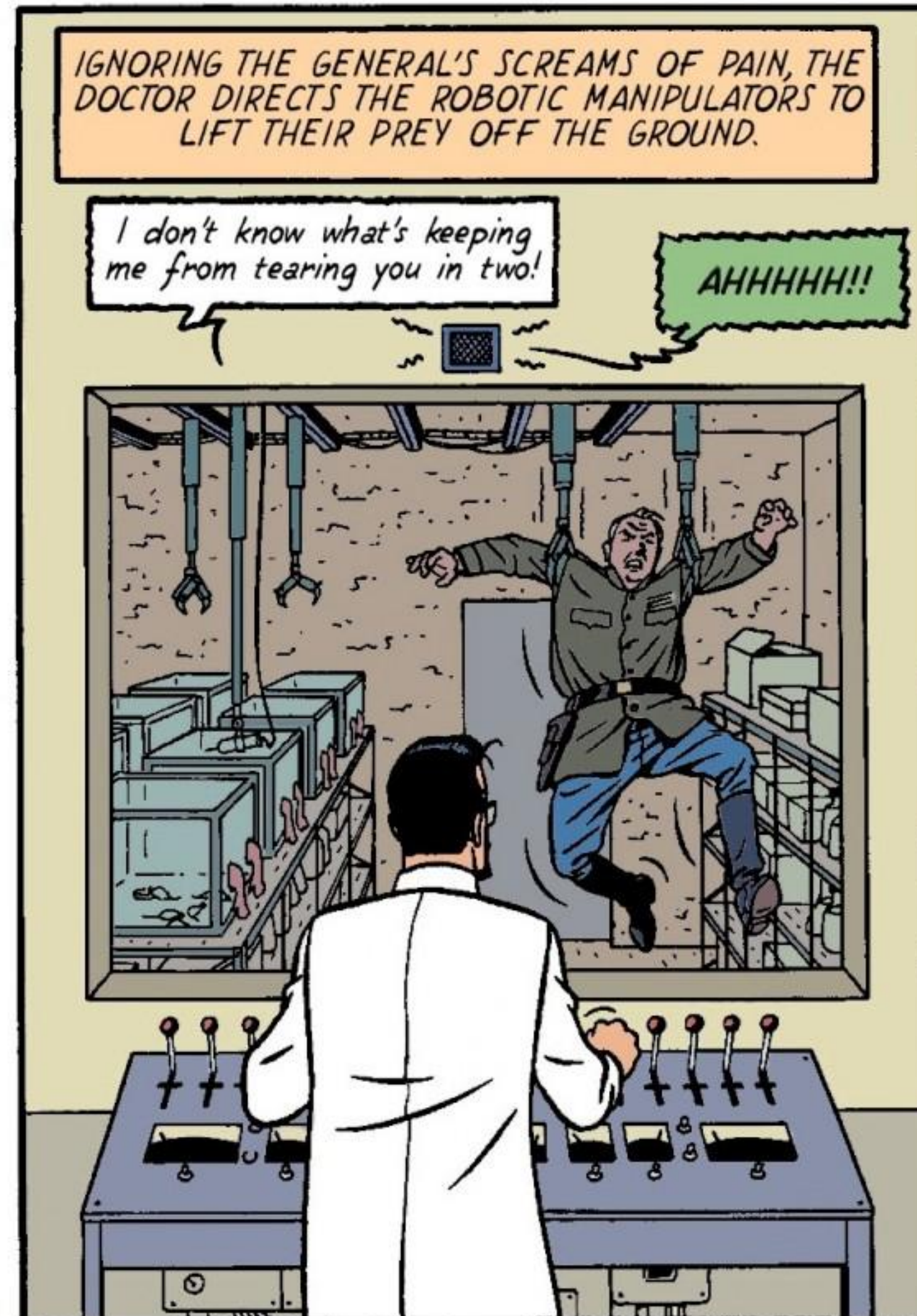


EVEN AS HE FRUITLESSLY STRUGGLES TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE MECHANICAL ARMS, THE UNFORTUNATE GENERAL TRIES TO KEEP HIS RISING PANIC FROM OVERWHELMING HIM.

You will stop this stupid joke right now, Voronov! The Kremlin already suspects you of plotting a coup! I advise you not to make things worse for yourself! Let go of me! That's an order!



An order?! You're giving me orders?! Know, comrade, that I am the only master here. If God existed, He himself would have to ask me for permission to come in! I find it rather bold of you to come and accuse me of plotting in my own demesne!



IGNORING THE GENERAL'S SCREAMS OF PAIN, THE DOCTOR DIRECTS THE ROBOTIC MANIPULATORS TO LIFT THEIR PREY OFF THE GROUND.

I don't know what's keeping me from tearing you in two!

AHHHHH!!



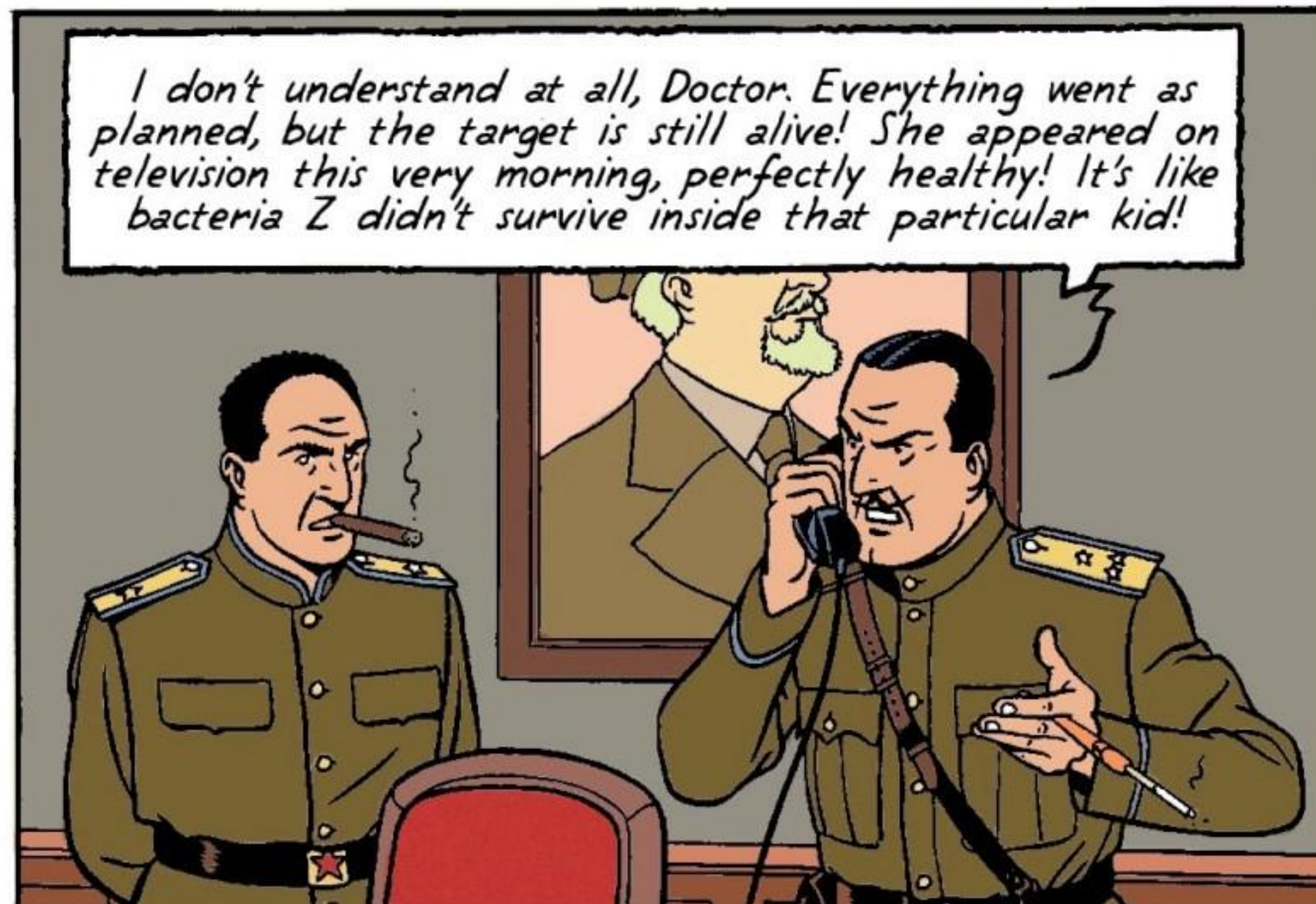
AS IF TO PULL VORONOV AWAY FROM HIS RAGE, THE TELEPHONE STARTS RINGING...

DRILLING
DRILLING

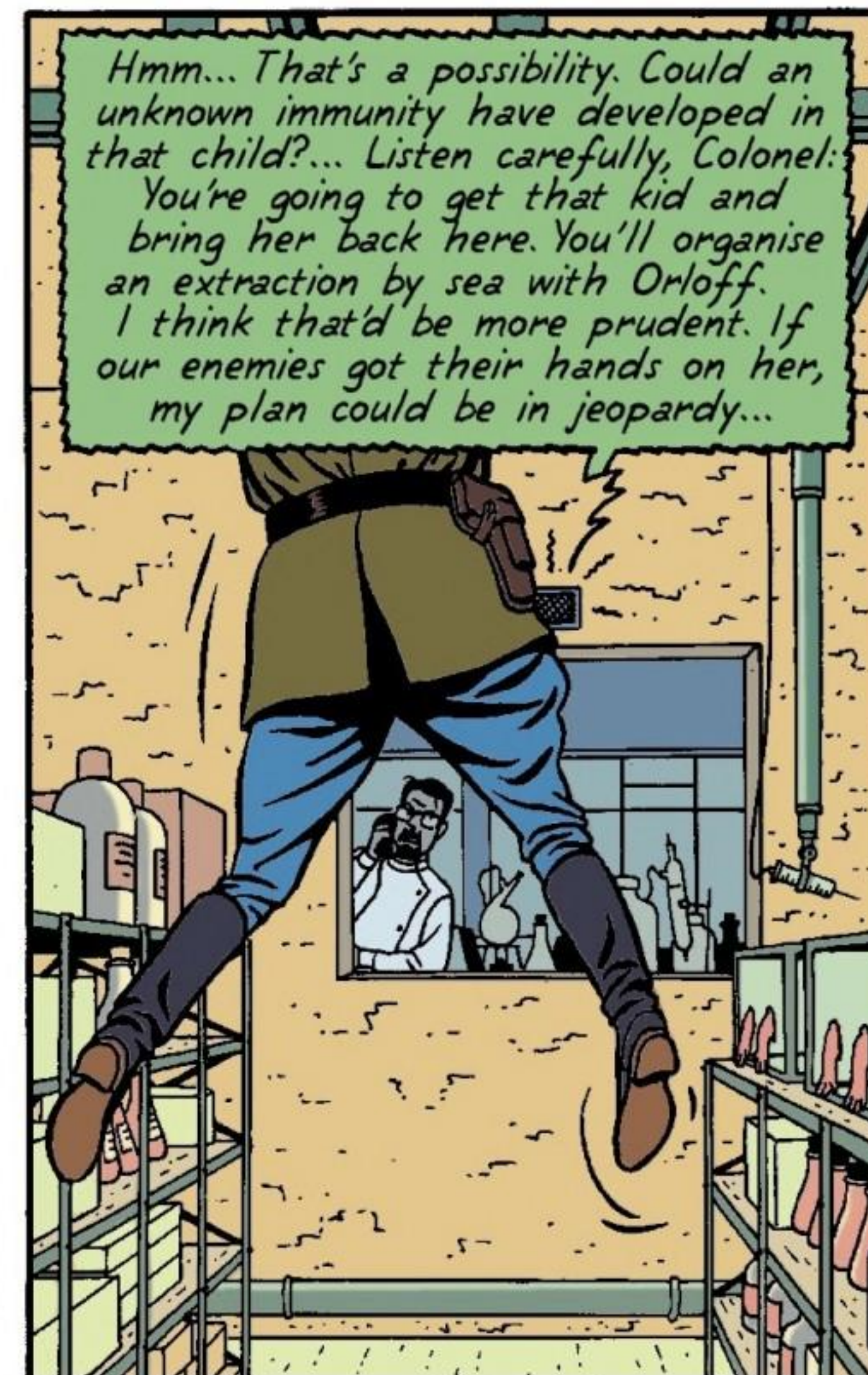


What now!?

Oh, it's you... So, what happened?



I don't understand at all, Doctor. Everything went as planned, but the target is still alive! She appeared on television this very morning, perfectly healthy! It's like bacteria Z didn't survive inside that particular kid!



Hmm... That's a possibility. Could an unknown immunity have developed in that child?... Listen carefully, Colonel! You're going to get that kid and bring her back here. You'll organise an extraction by sea with Orloff. I think that'd be more prudent. If our enemies got their hands on her, my plan could be in jeopardy...

DZEEEEEE

A new revolution is coming, comrade...



... Unfortunately, my old friend Ufa just informed me that the Kremlin might have some suspicions about me.

You should have turned off your microphone, Voronov. I heard everything! This phone call is a confession! You're finished, Doctor! Let me go right this minute, or else I'll...



You're the one who's finished, General. You and your decadent generation that renounces the ideals and discipline taught us by Lenin and the great Stalin. I, Voronov, will not fail their memories.



... and curse those who would seek to stop it!

What... What is this?... No! No-o-o-o!!!

EARLY ON THIS MORNING OF JULY 6, CAPTAIN BLAKE HAS ORGANISED A MEETING TO ANALYSE THE DOCUMENTS—PHOTOGRAPHED OR FILMED—OF THE BACTERIA Z VICTIMS' LAST PUBLIC APPEARANCES.

... And thanks to the documents provided by the Soviets, we now have images of some 35 cases to study. The idea is that your specialists' eyes should find something in those public ceremonies... something abnormal that repeats every time.

Gentlemen, we must find how bacteria Z manage to infect their victims without the public or security forces noticing! Unless there are any questions, I suggest we watch the documents right away.



FOR THREE HOURS, THE PICTURES TAKEN THROUGHOUT THE USSR AND THE WESTERN WORLD MARCH ACROSS THE SCREEN WITHOUT PROVIDING AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM.



AFTER THE SHOWING, BLAKE SPEAKS AGAIN.

Gentlemen, thank you. I suggest we meet again in three days. Until then, I advise you to take a step back, let your impressions settle, and prepare your conclusions. Let your imagination speak as freely as possible. Good luck!

Sorry, Francis. I didn't find anything.

And yet, the solution is hidden in those images; that's a certainty.

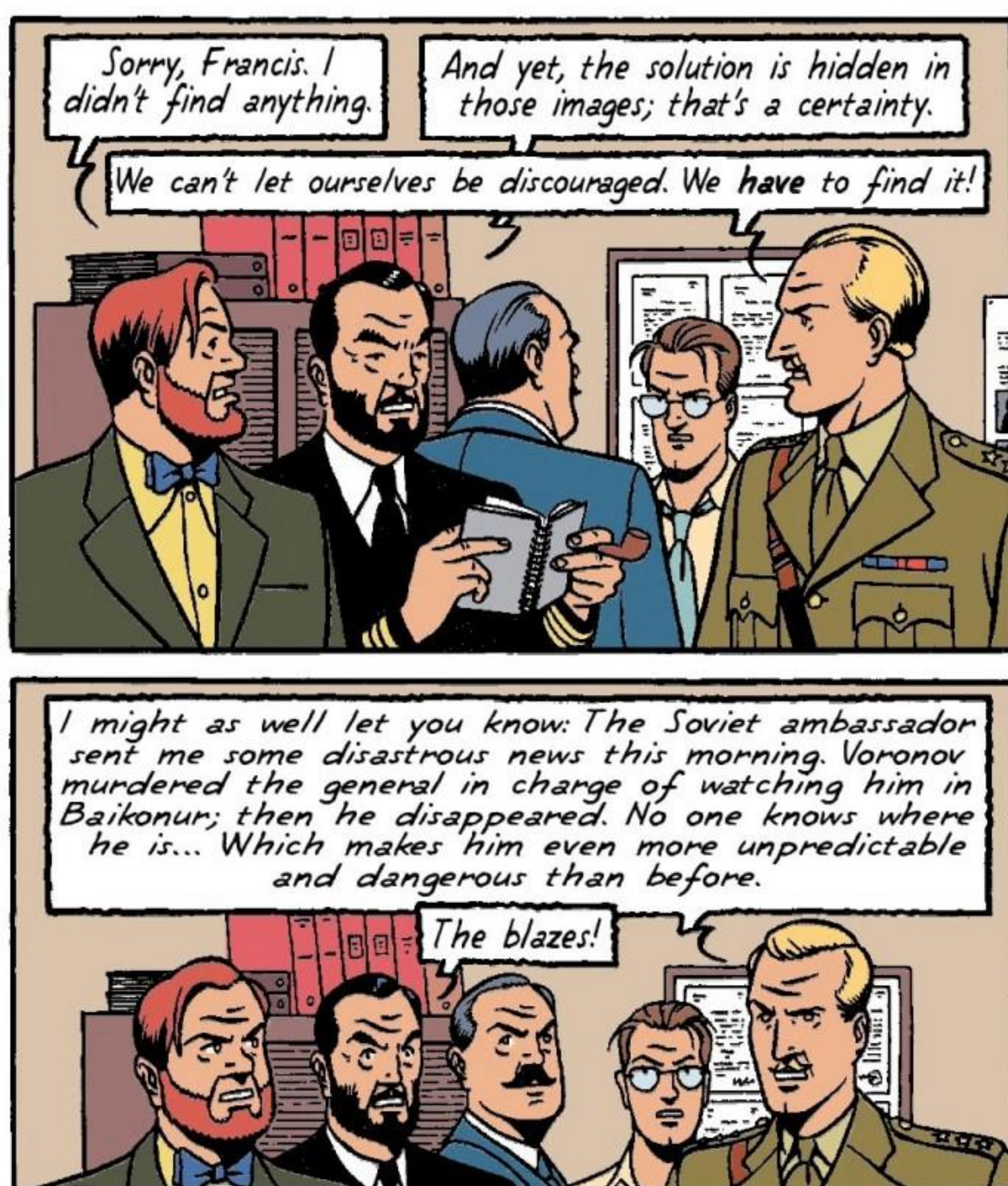
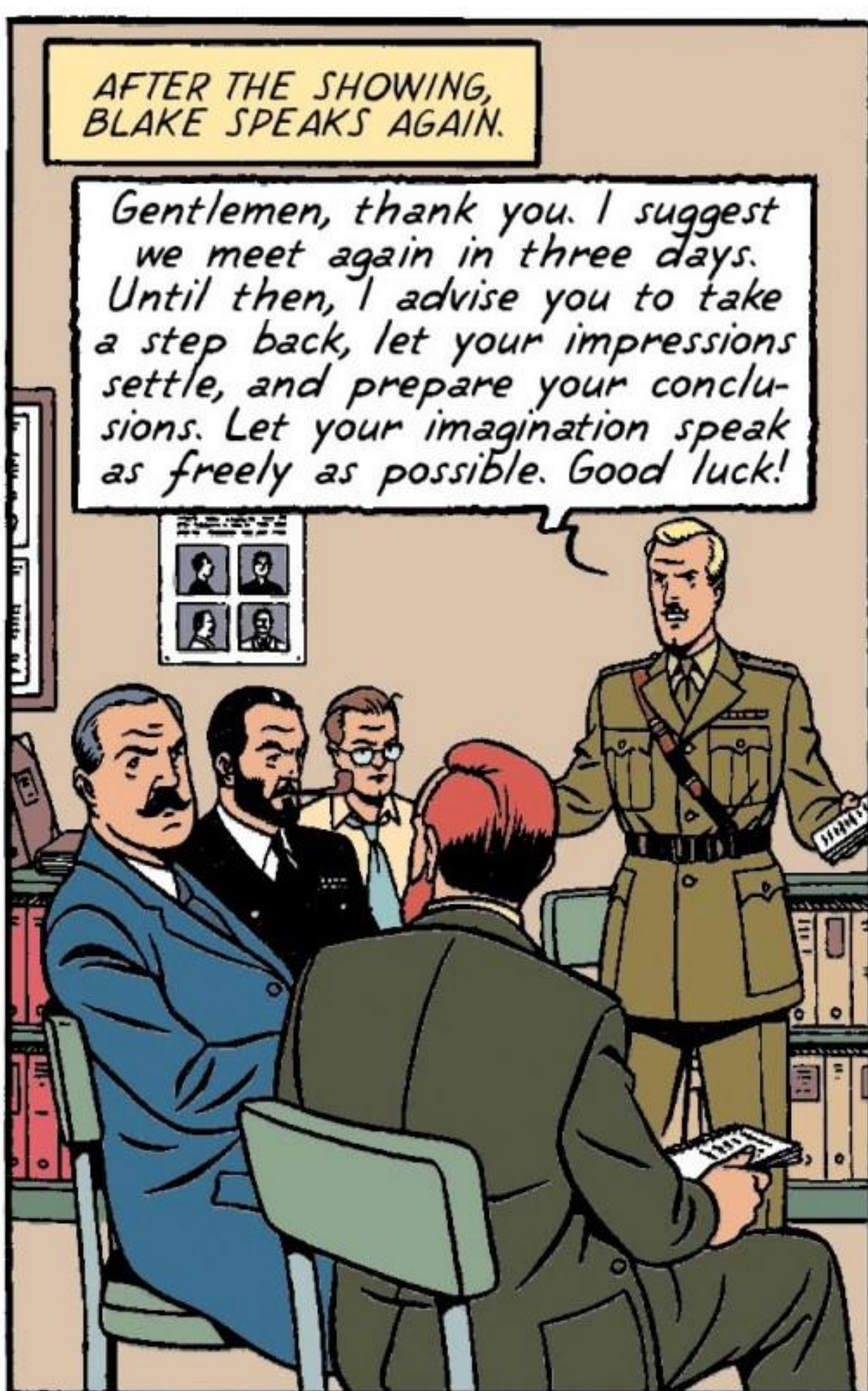
We can't let ourselves be discouraged. We have to find it!

Carry on with your research, Philip. As for me, I'm headed to Washington with these images for a briefing with the Americans. My plane leaves in two hours. I'll call you as soon as I'm back, day after tomorrow. Good luck!

You can count on me, old chap. I'll do my utmost to have some good news for you when you come back. In the meantime, take advantage of this trip to get some sleep.

I might as well let you know: The Soviet ambassador sent me some disastrous news this morning. Voronov murdered the general in charge of watching him in Baikonur; then he disappeared. No one knows where he is... Which makes him even more unpredictable and dangerous than before.

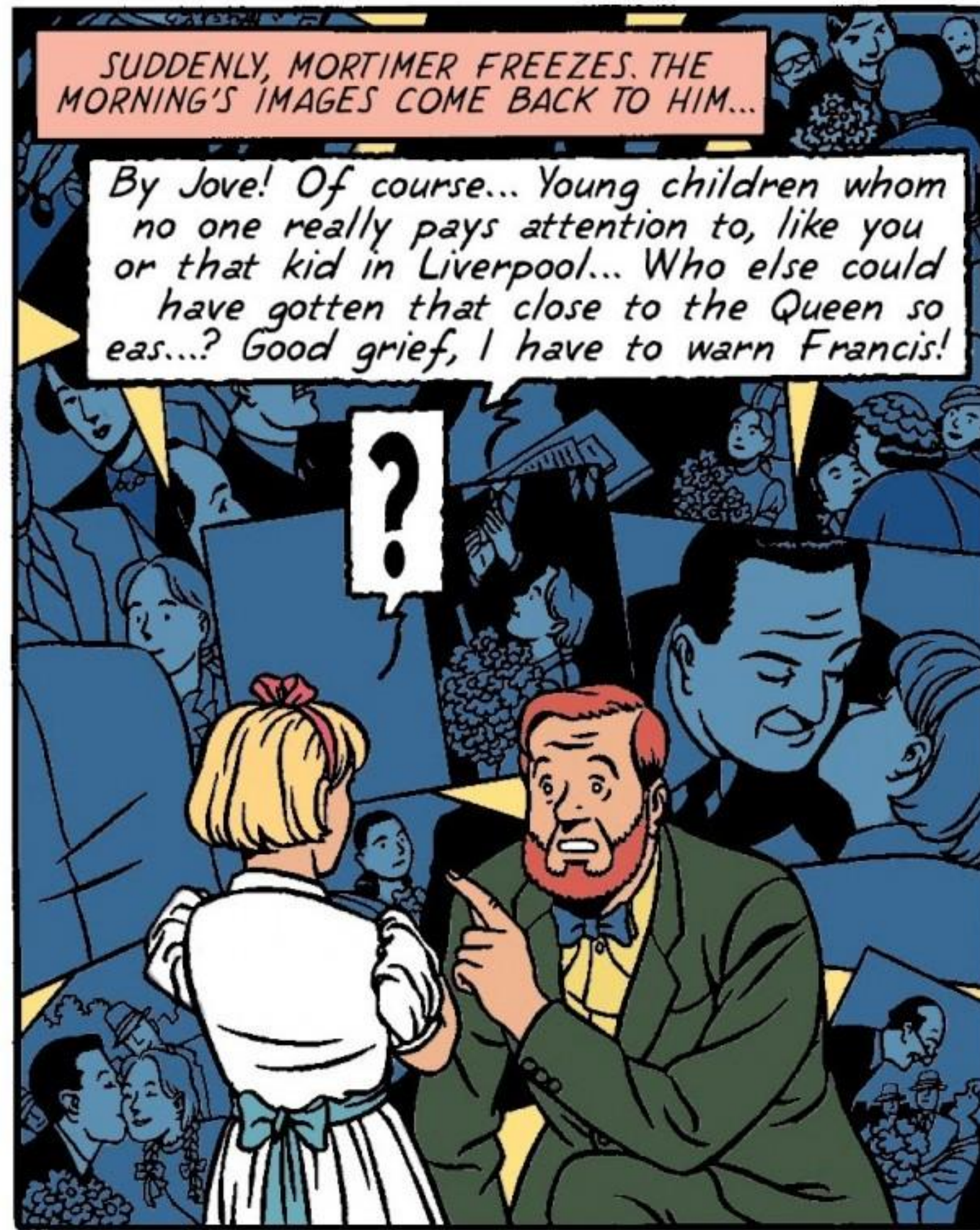
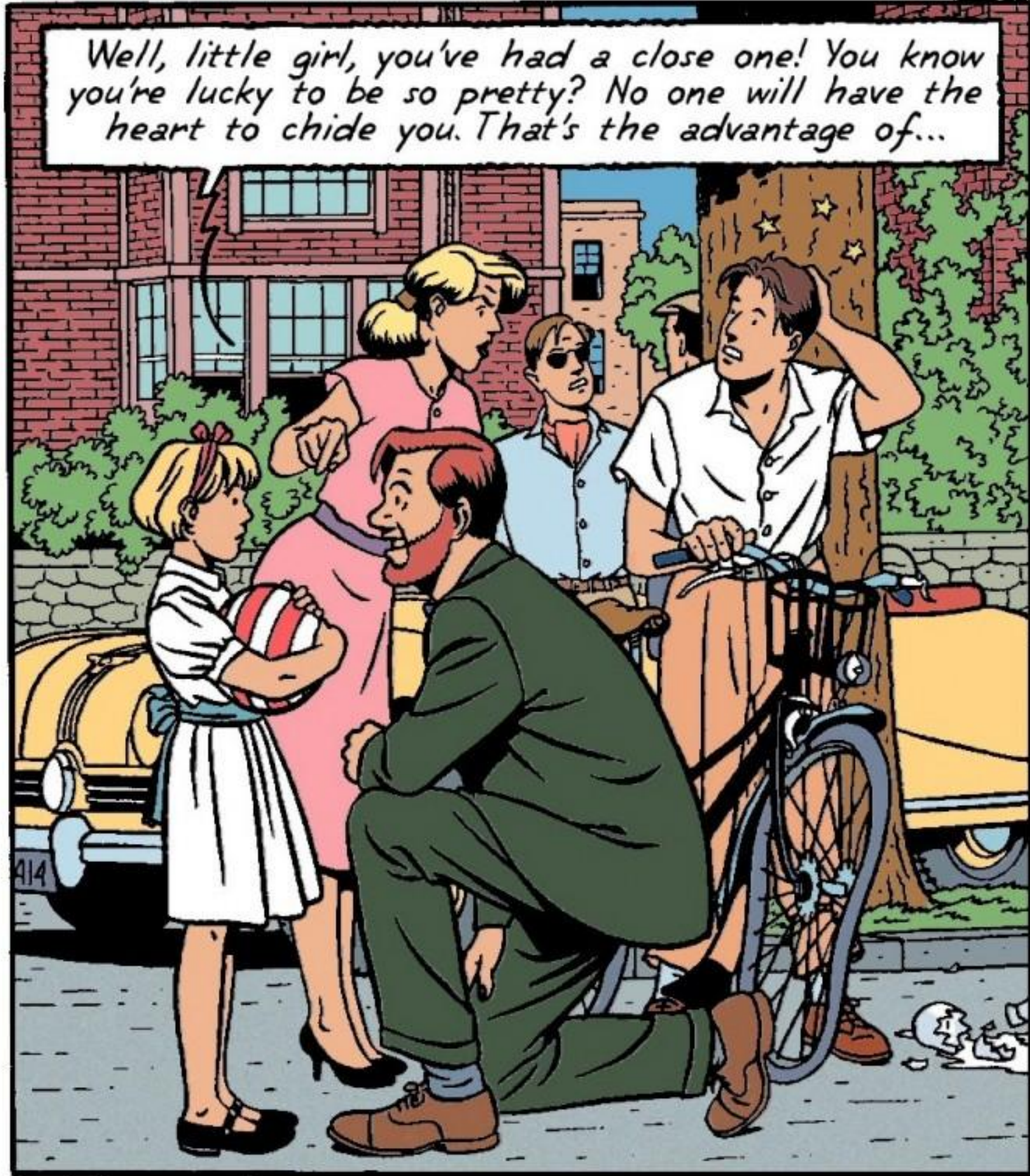
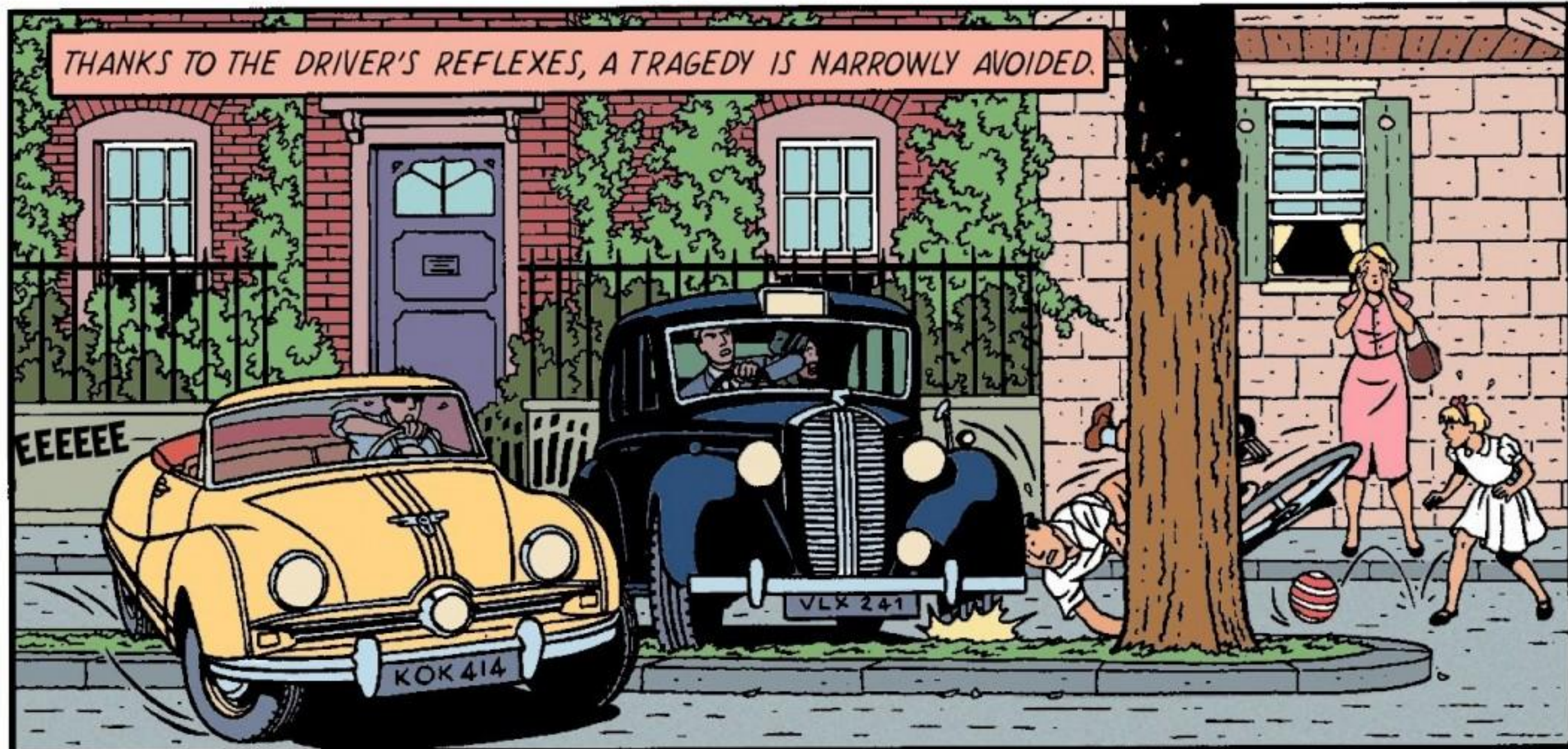
The blazes!

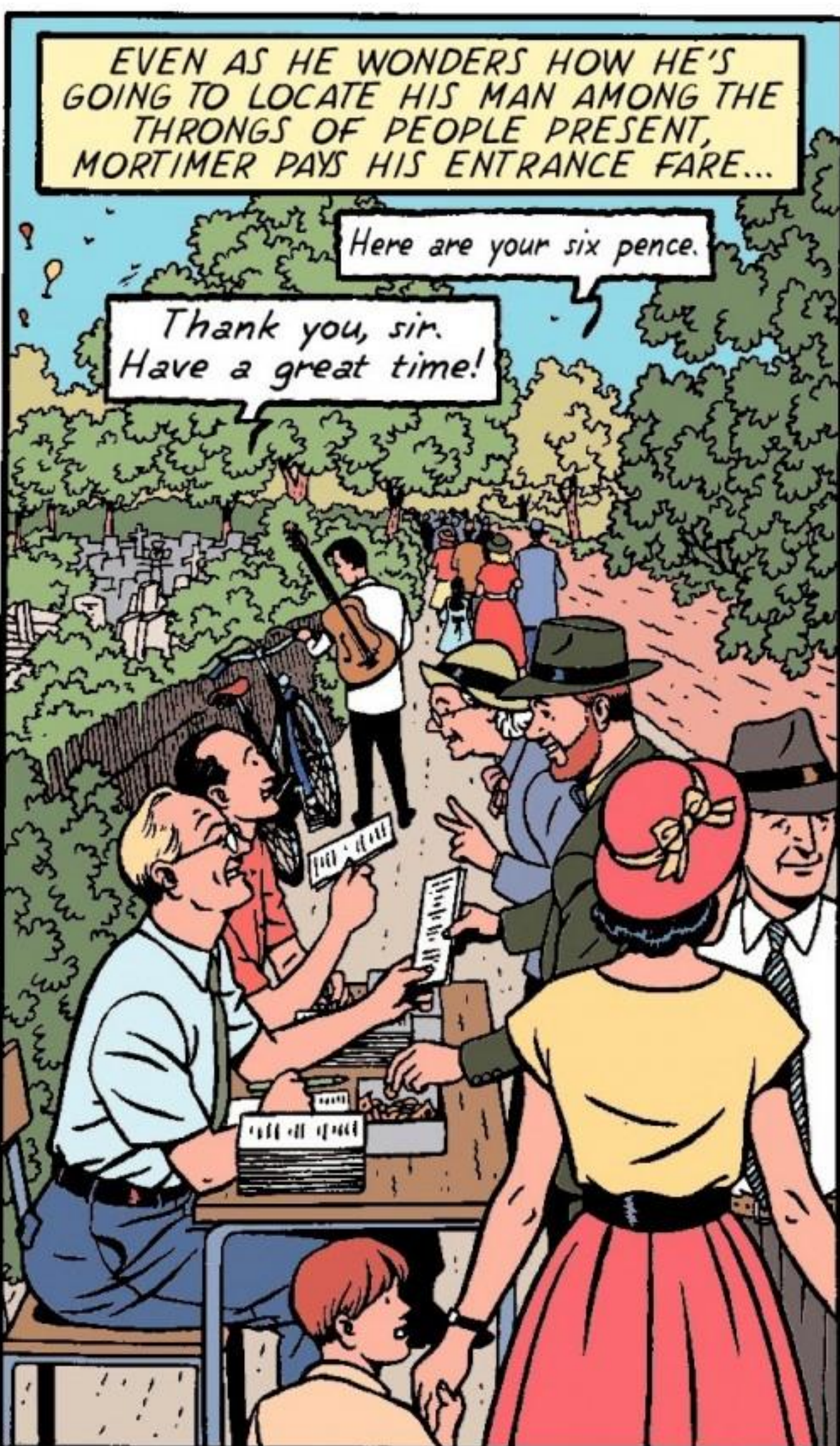
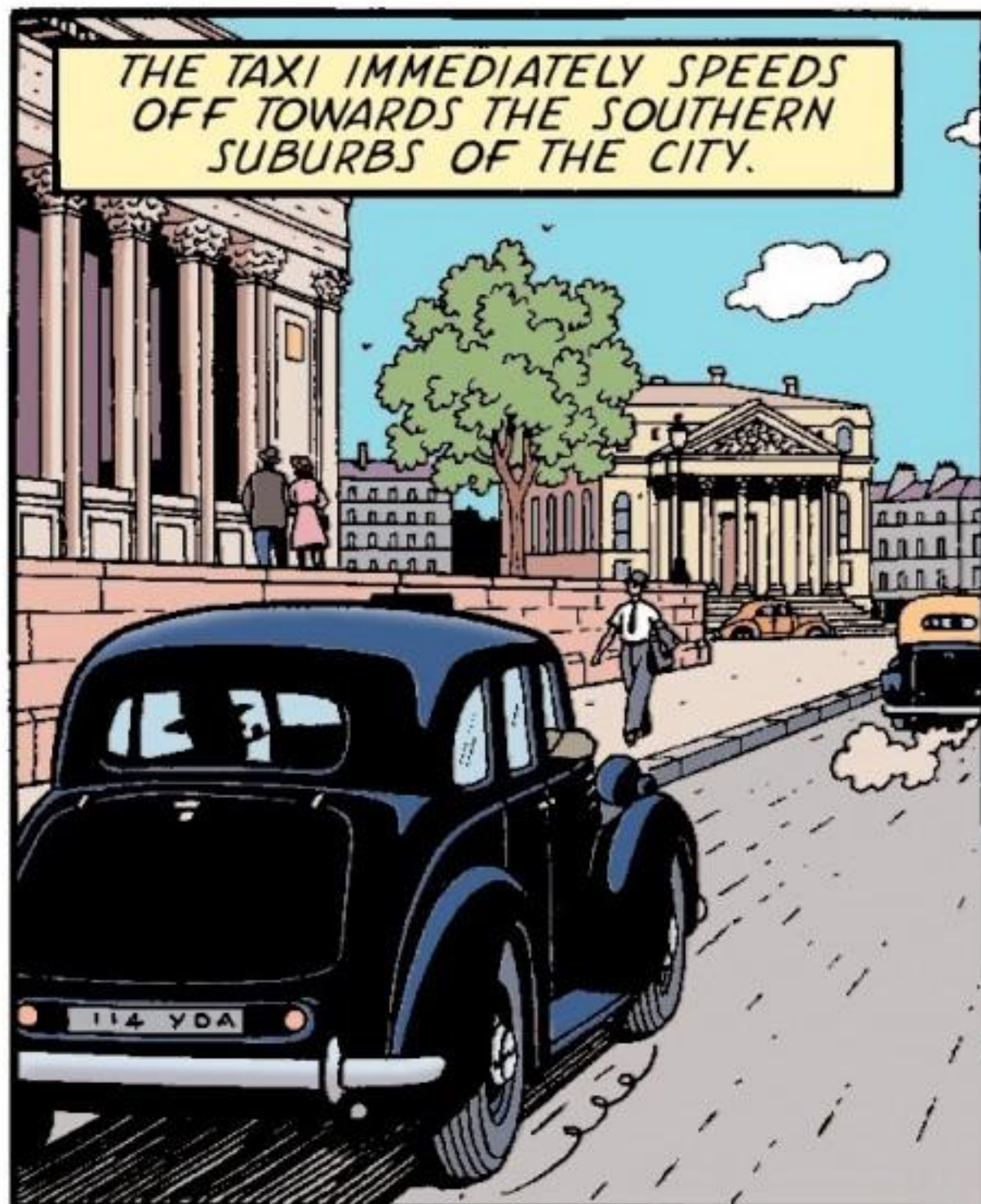
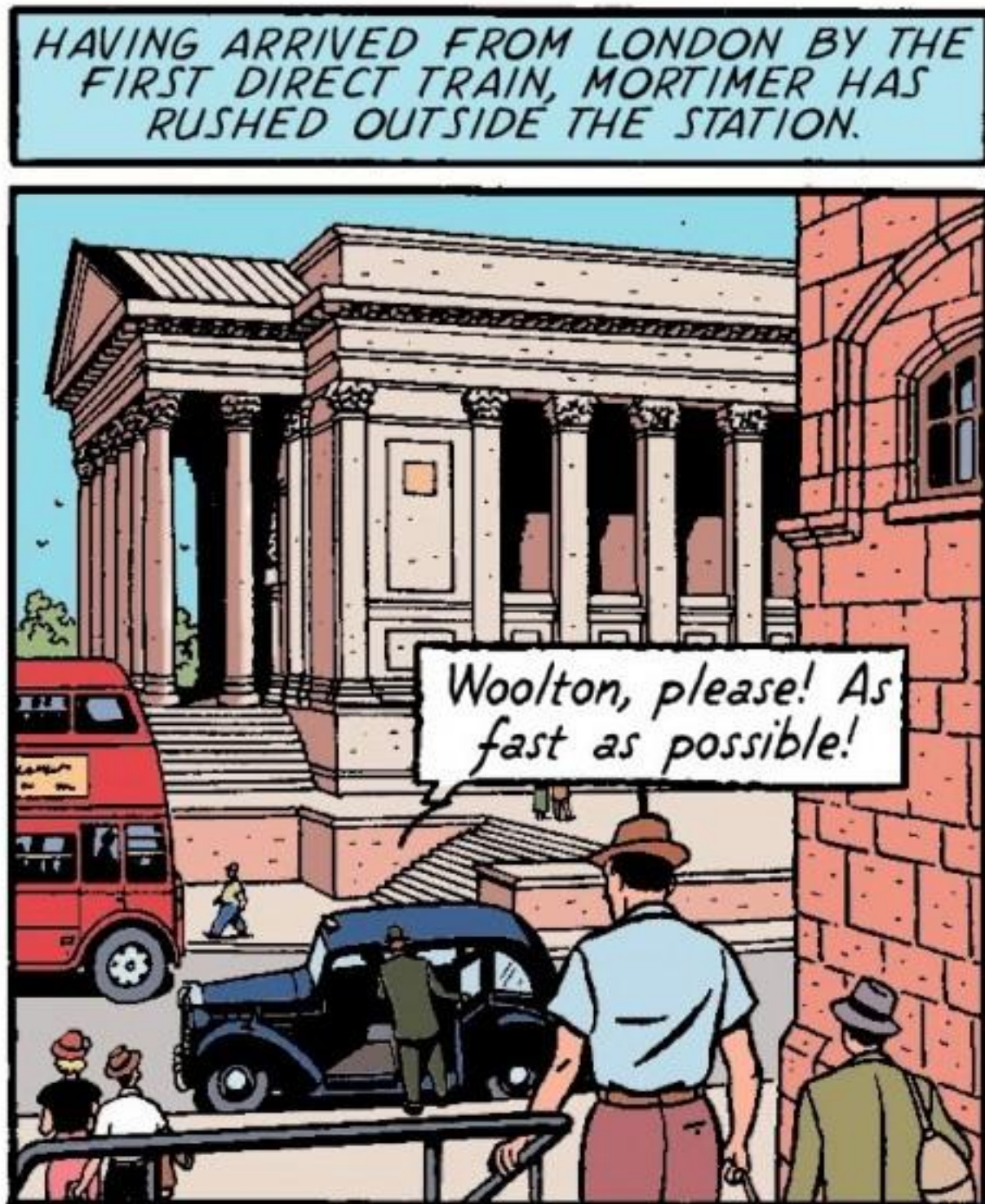


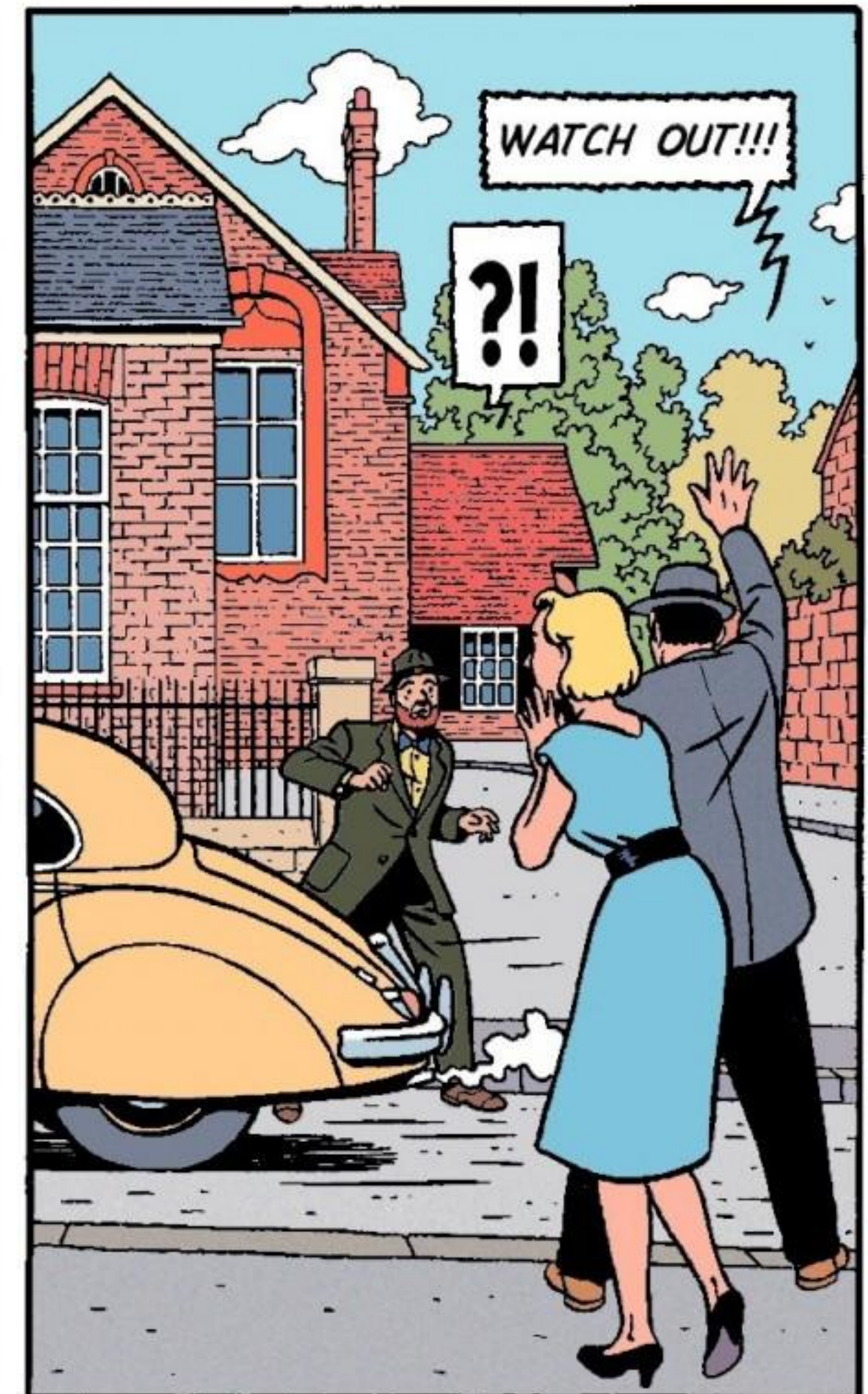
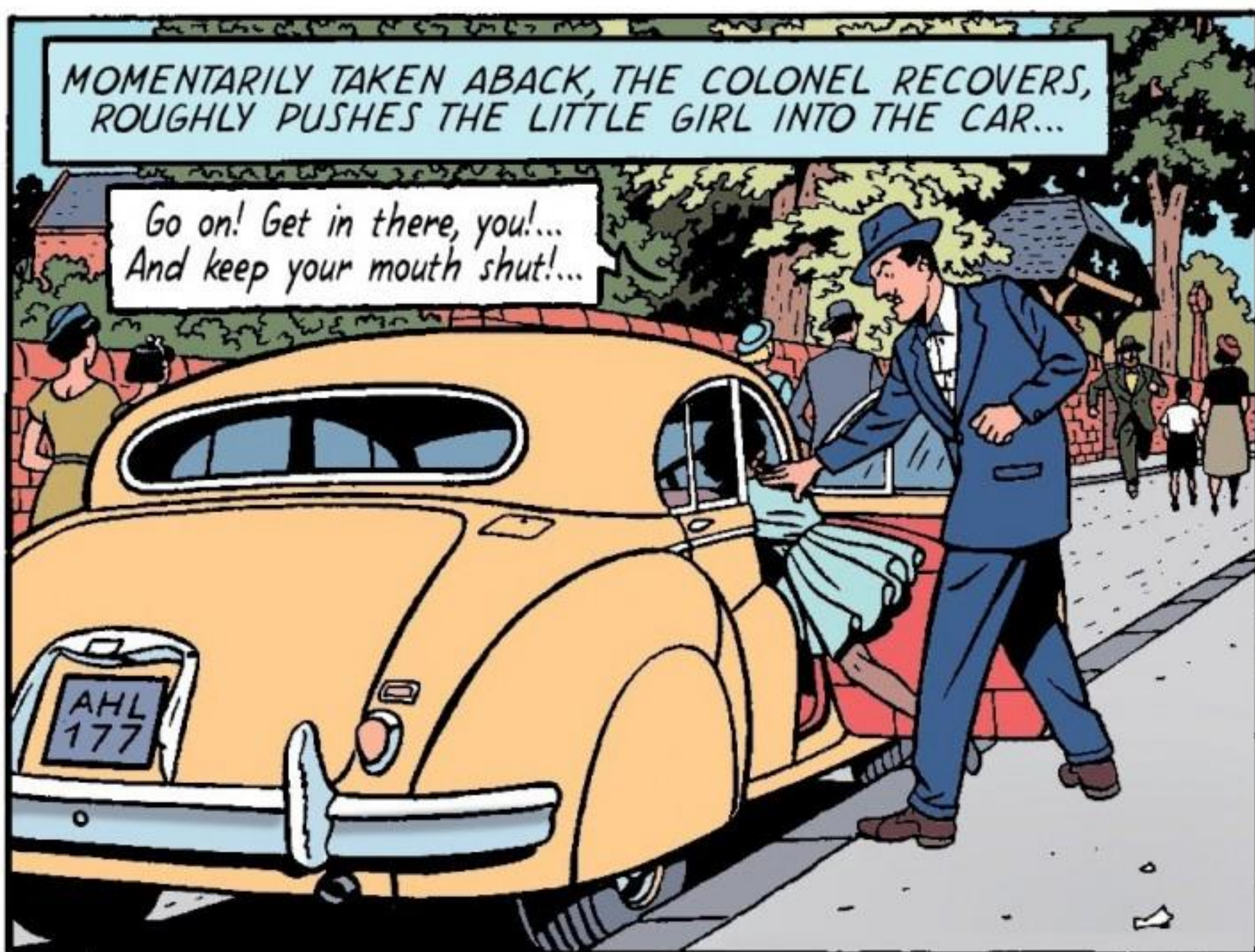
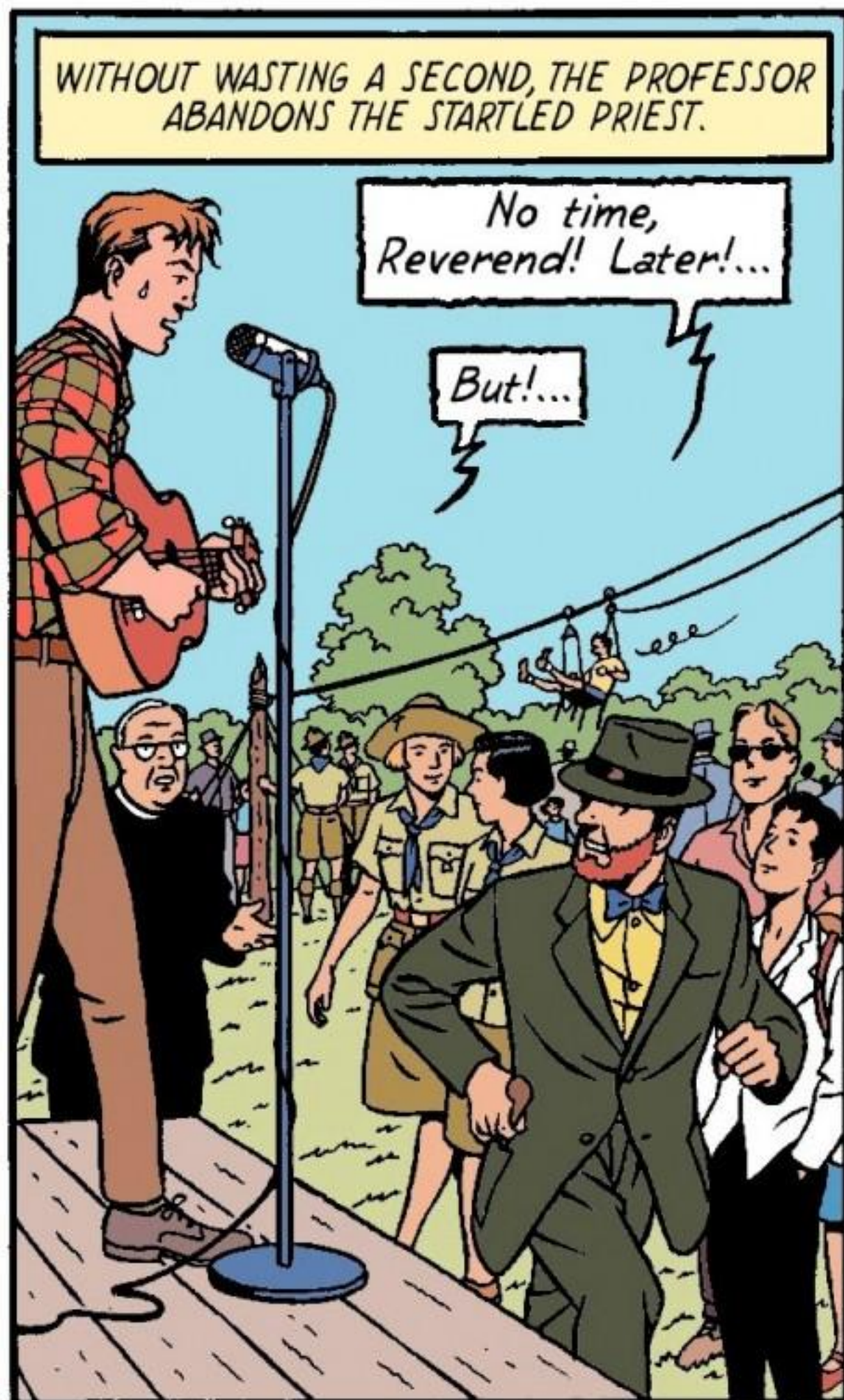
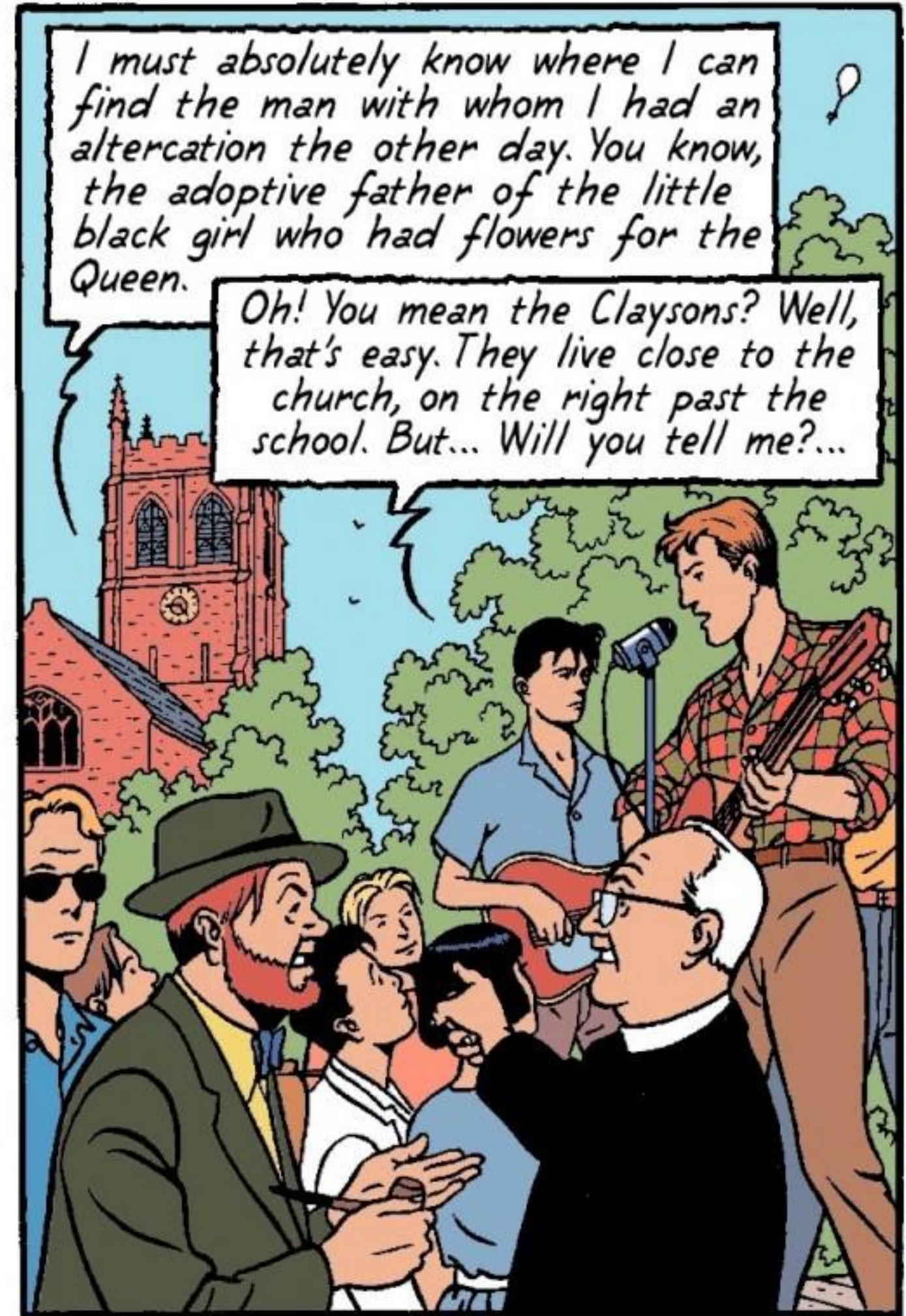
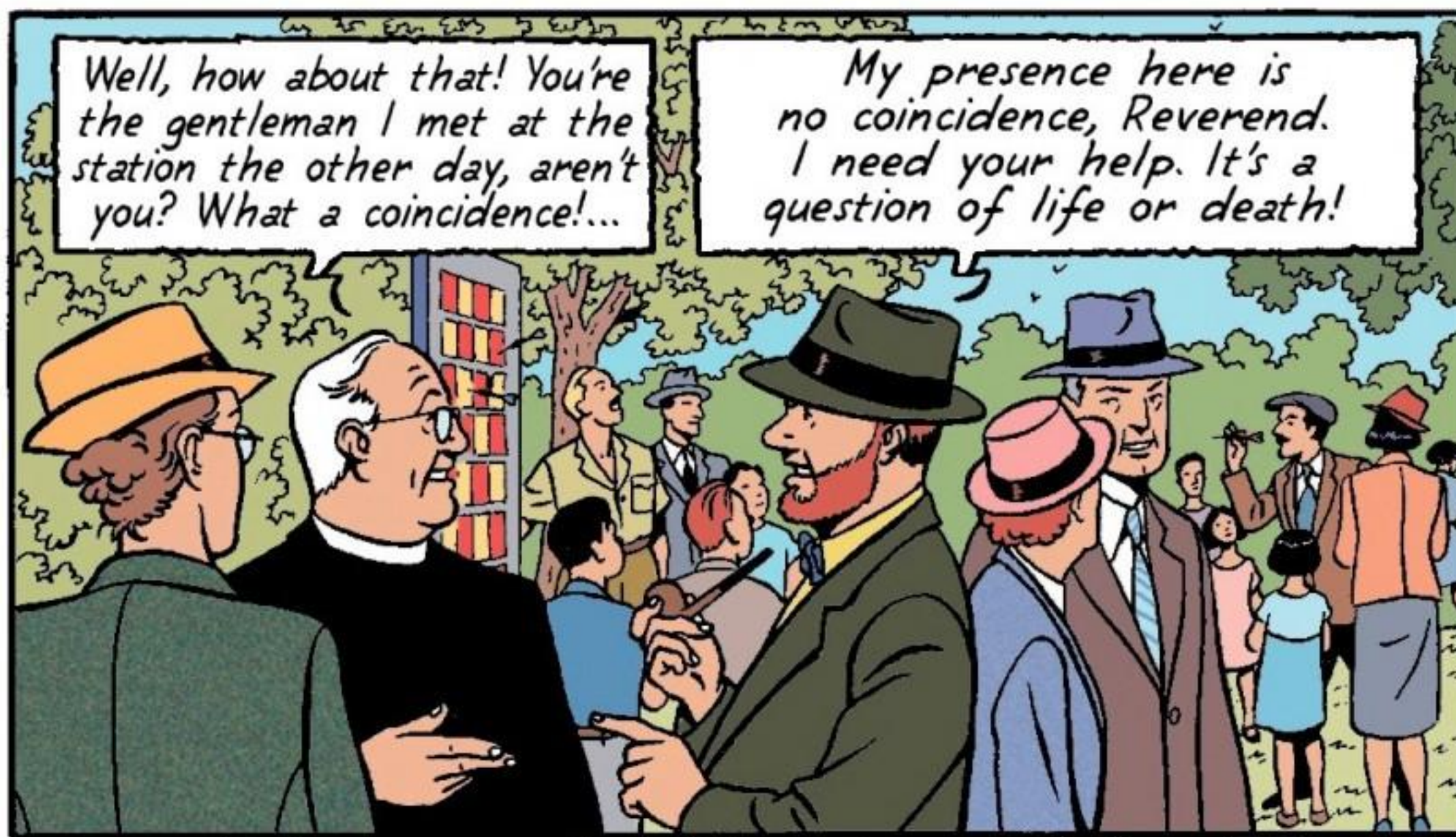
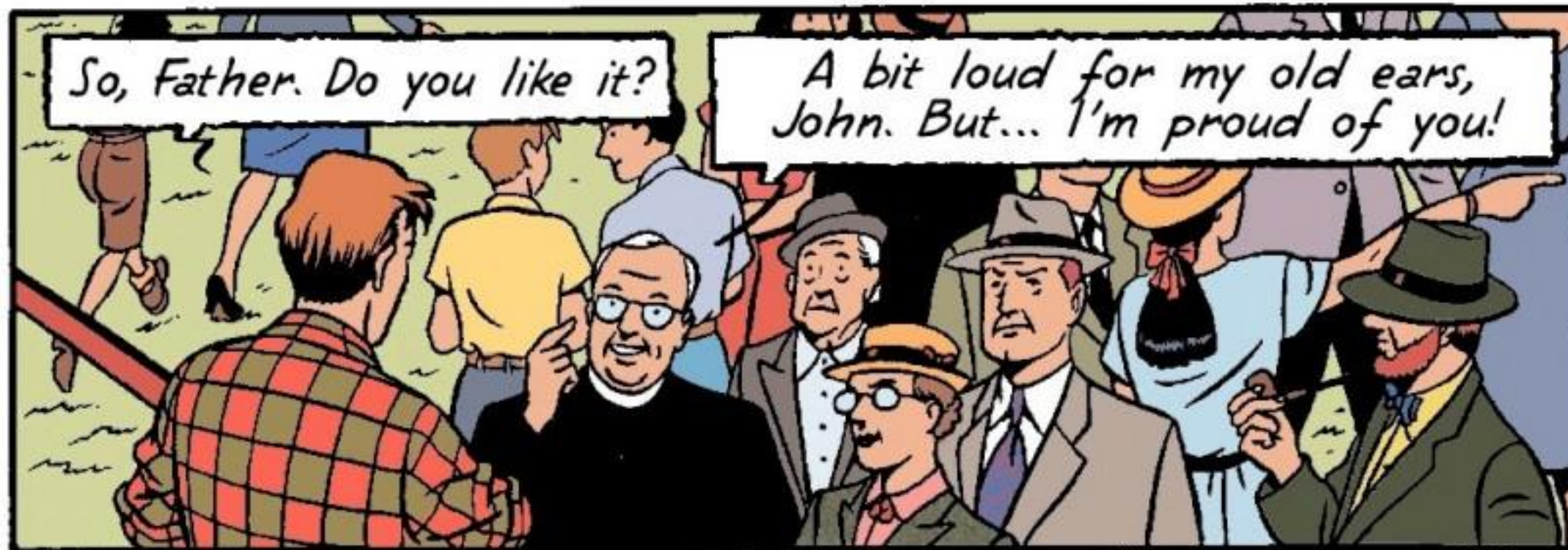
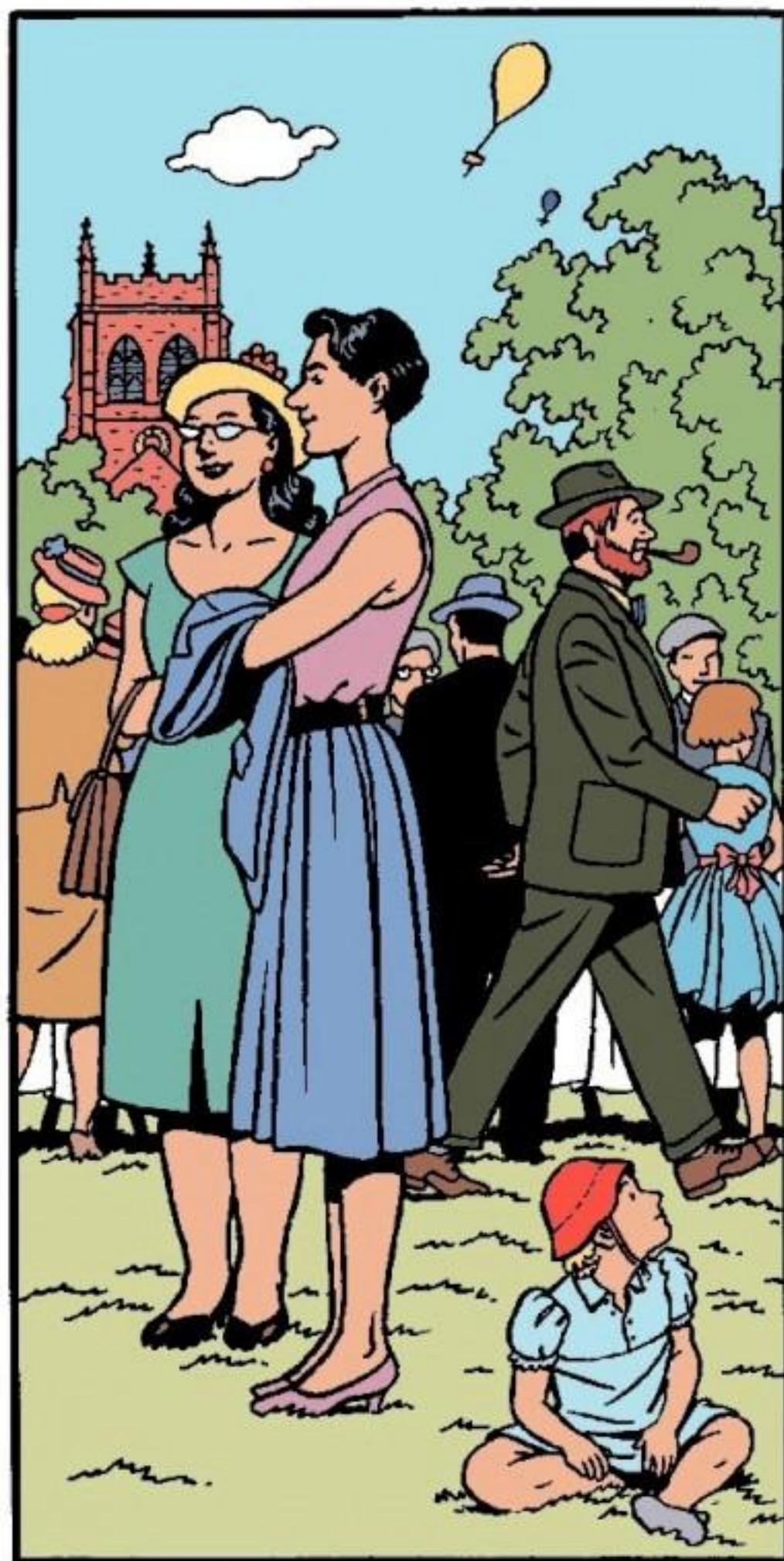
AFTER LEAVING THE MIS BUILDING, PROFESSOR MORTIMER FEELS THE NEED TO WALK, TO CLEAR HIS MIND OF THE CONFUSION LEFT BY THE PICTURES HE'S JUST SEEN. AFTER 15 MINUTES OF UNFRUITFUL COGITATION, THOUGH, HE DECIDES TO FLAG DOWN A TAXI.

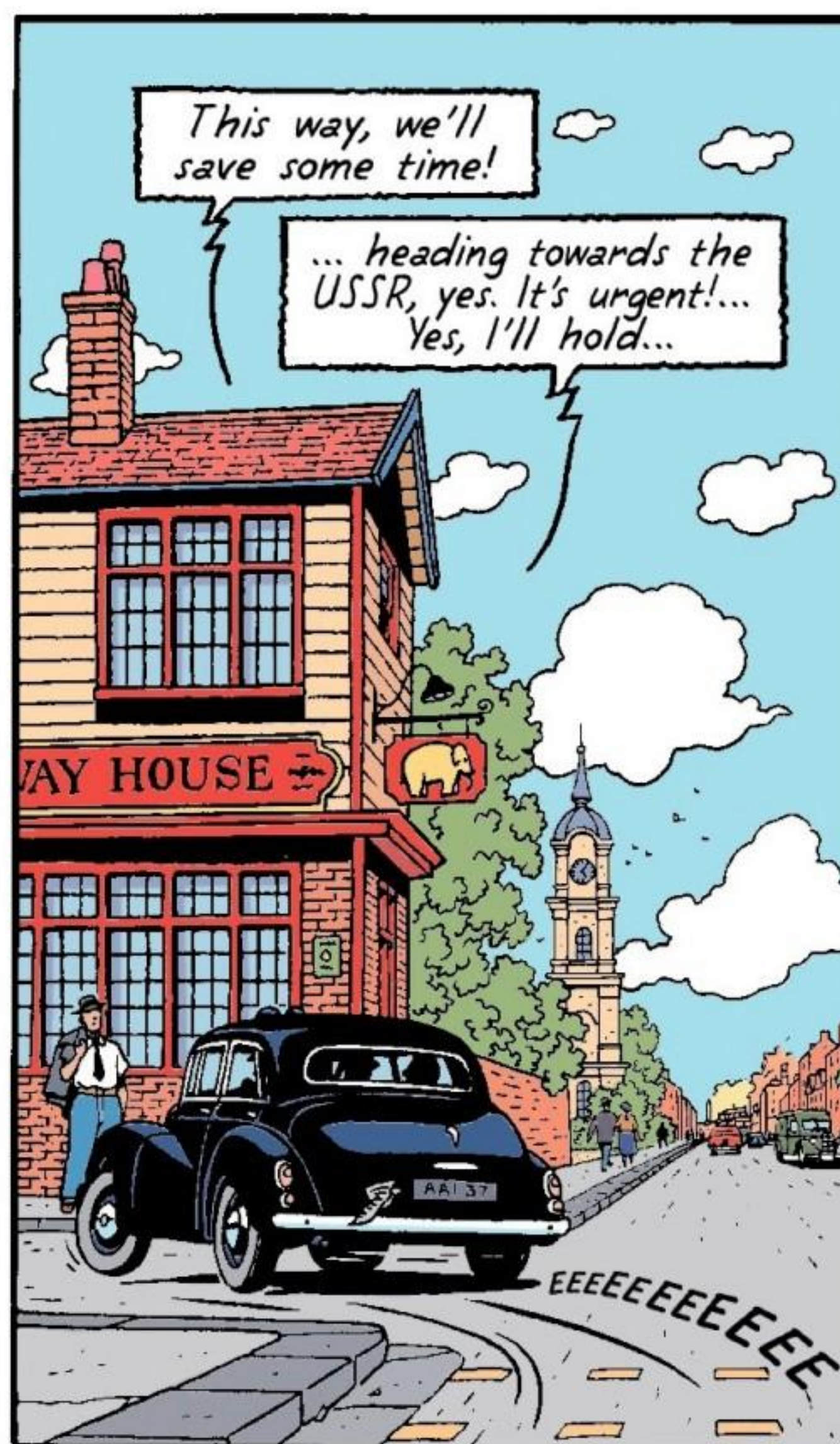
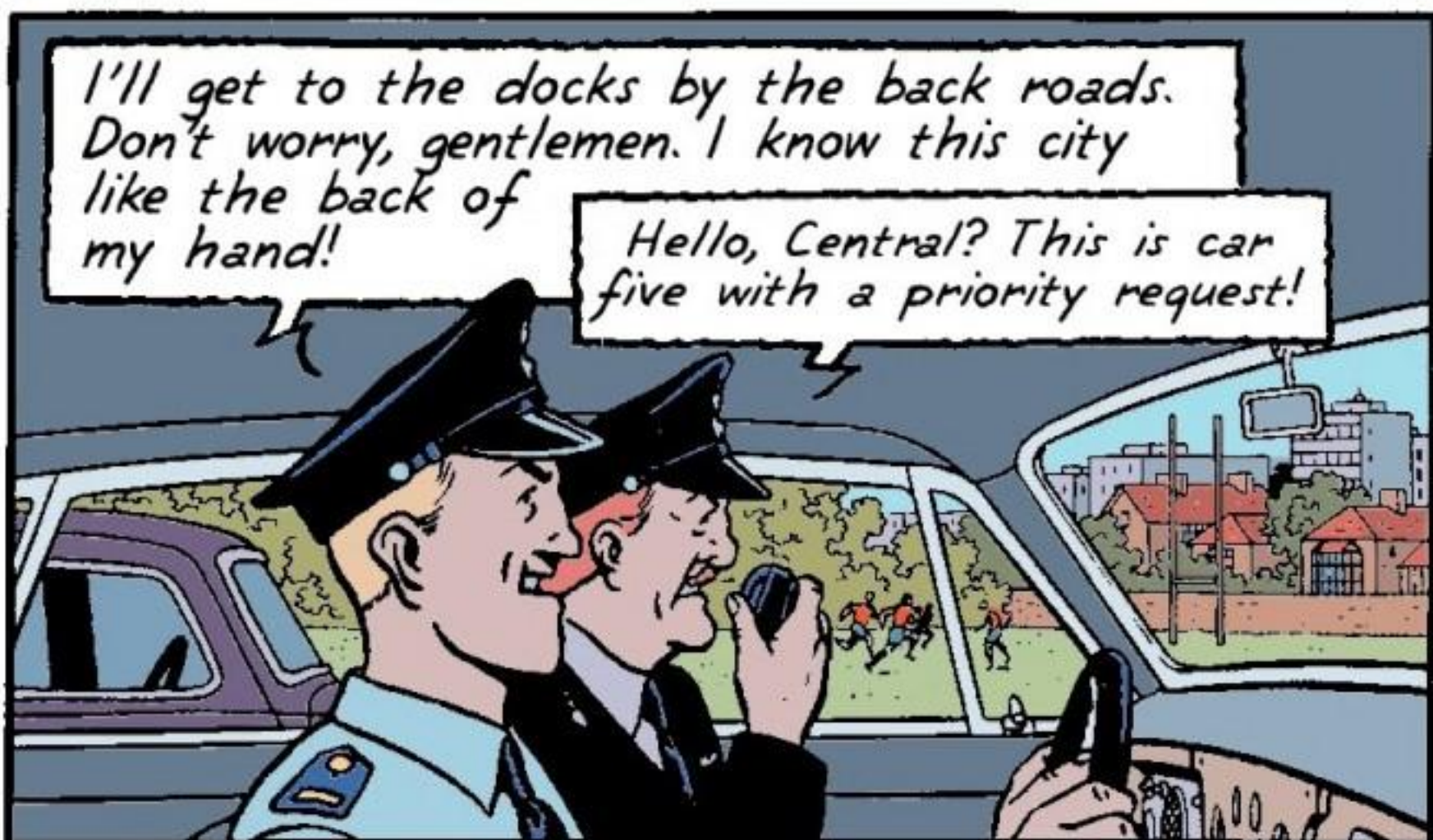
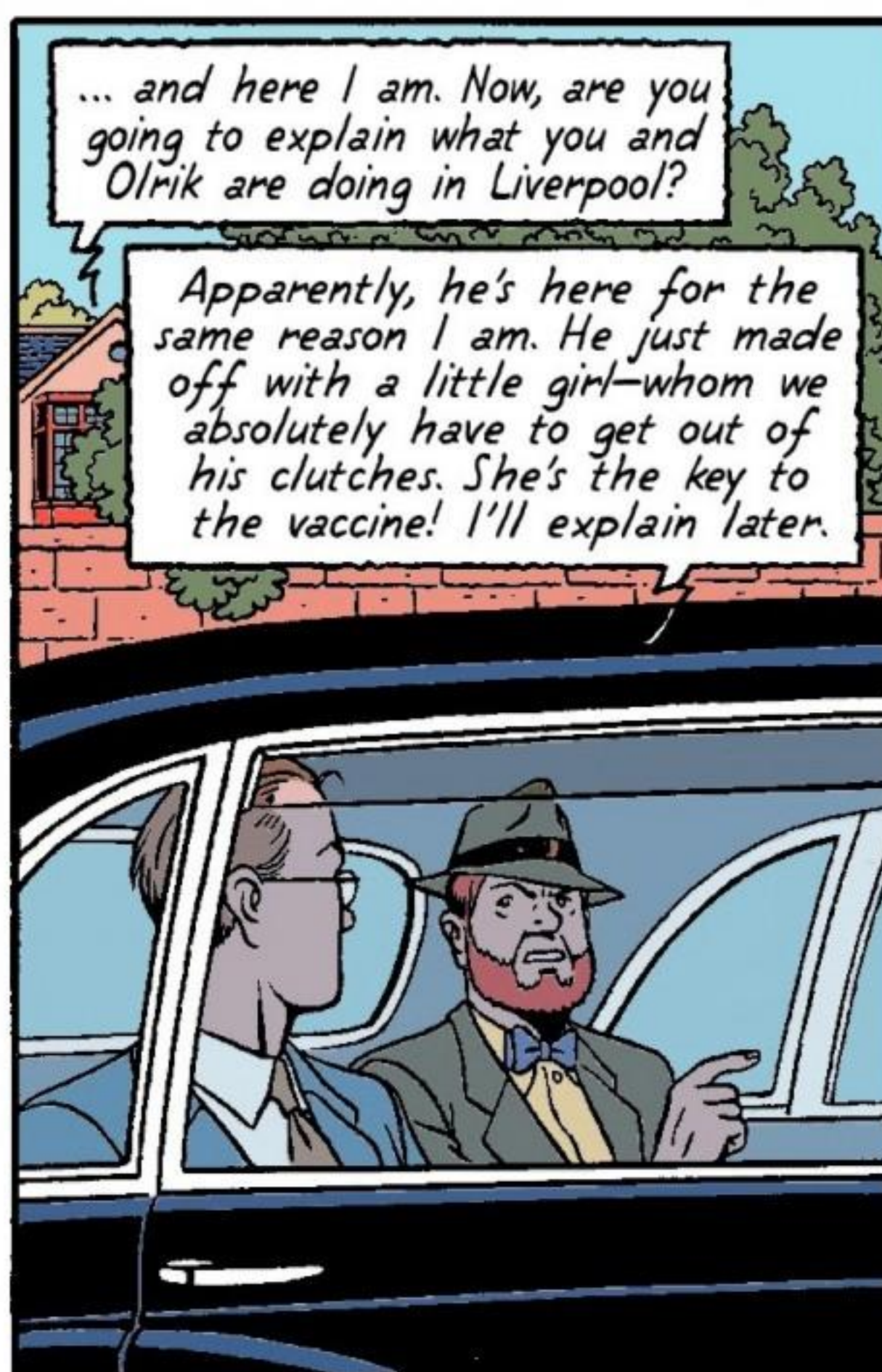
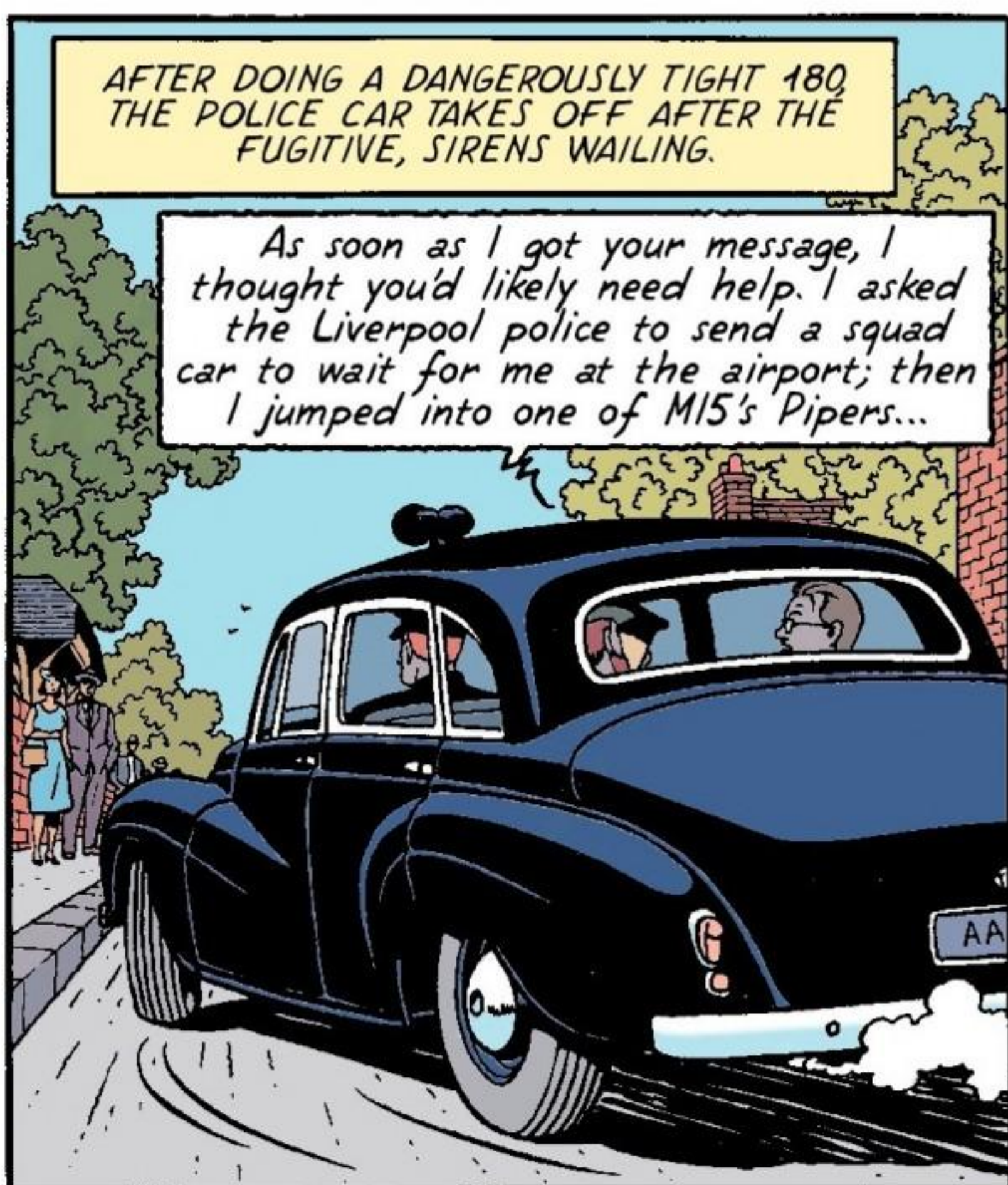


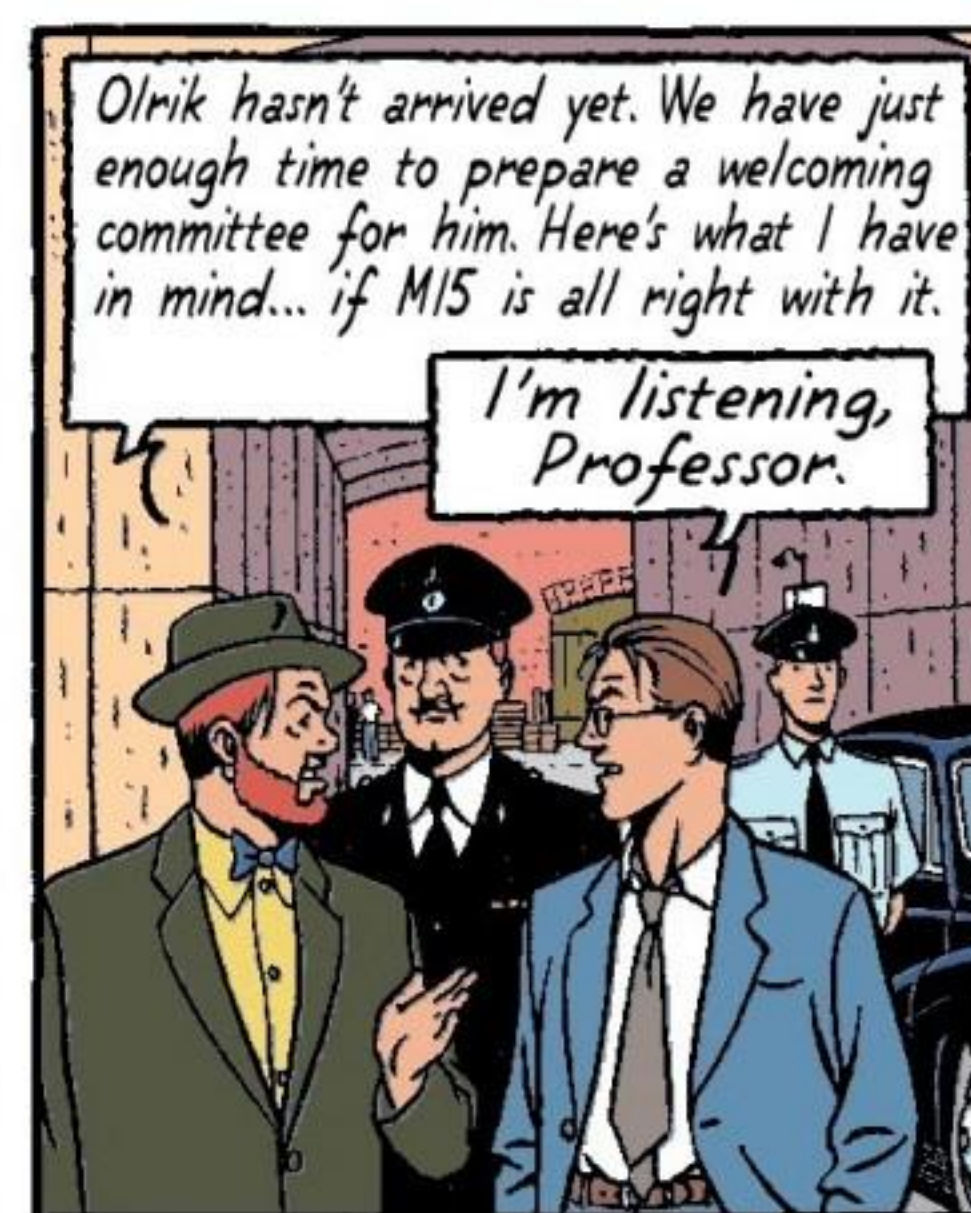
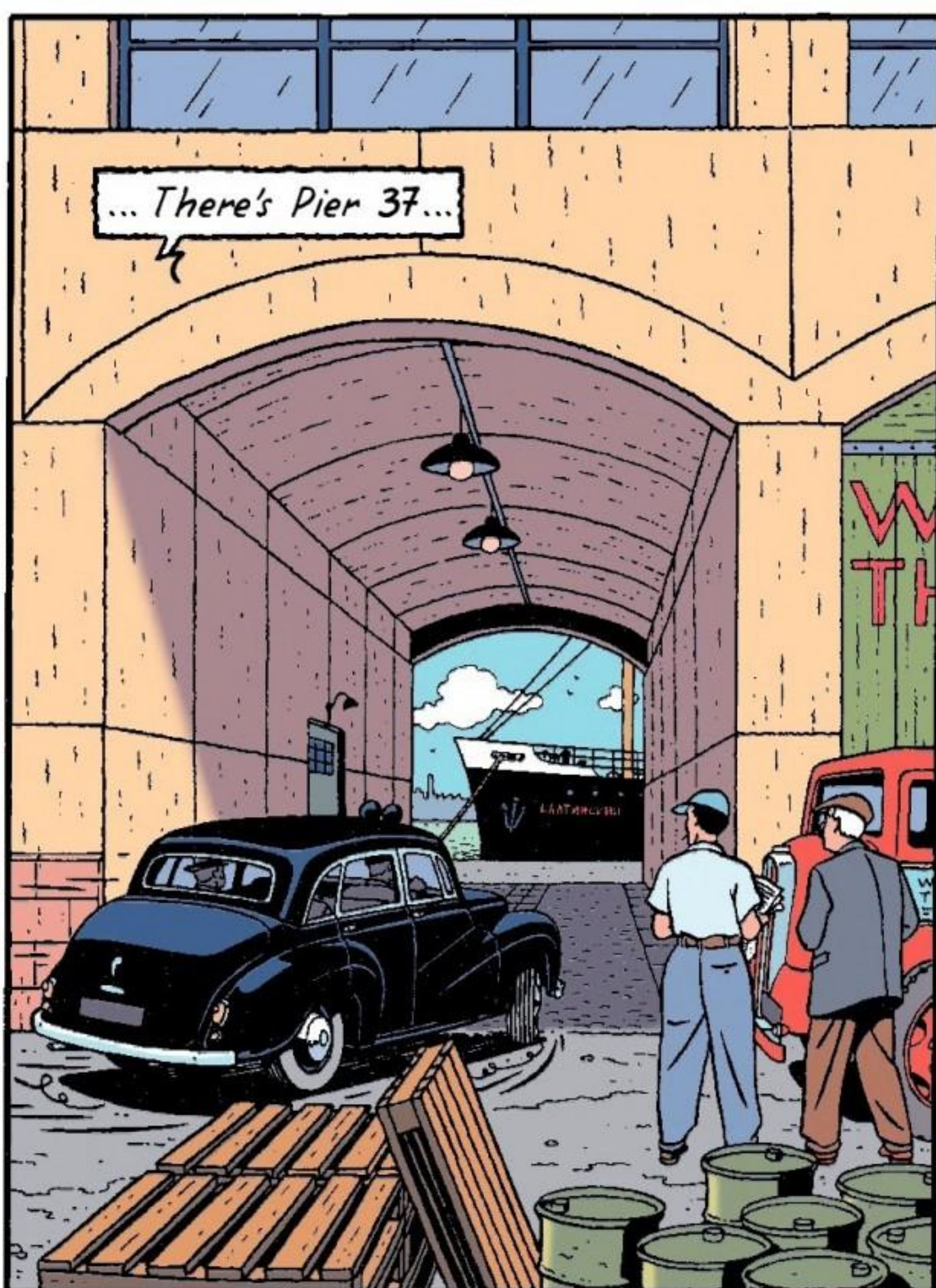
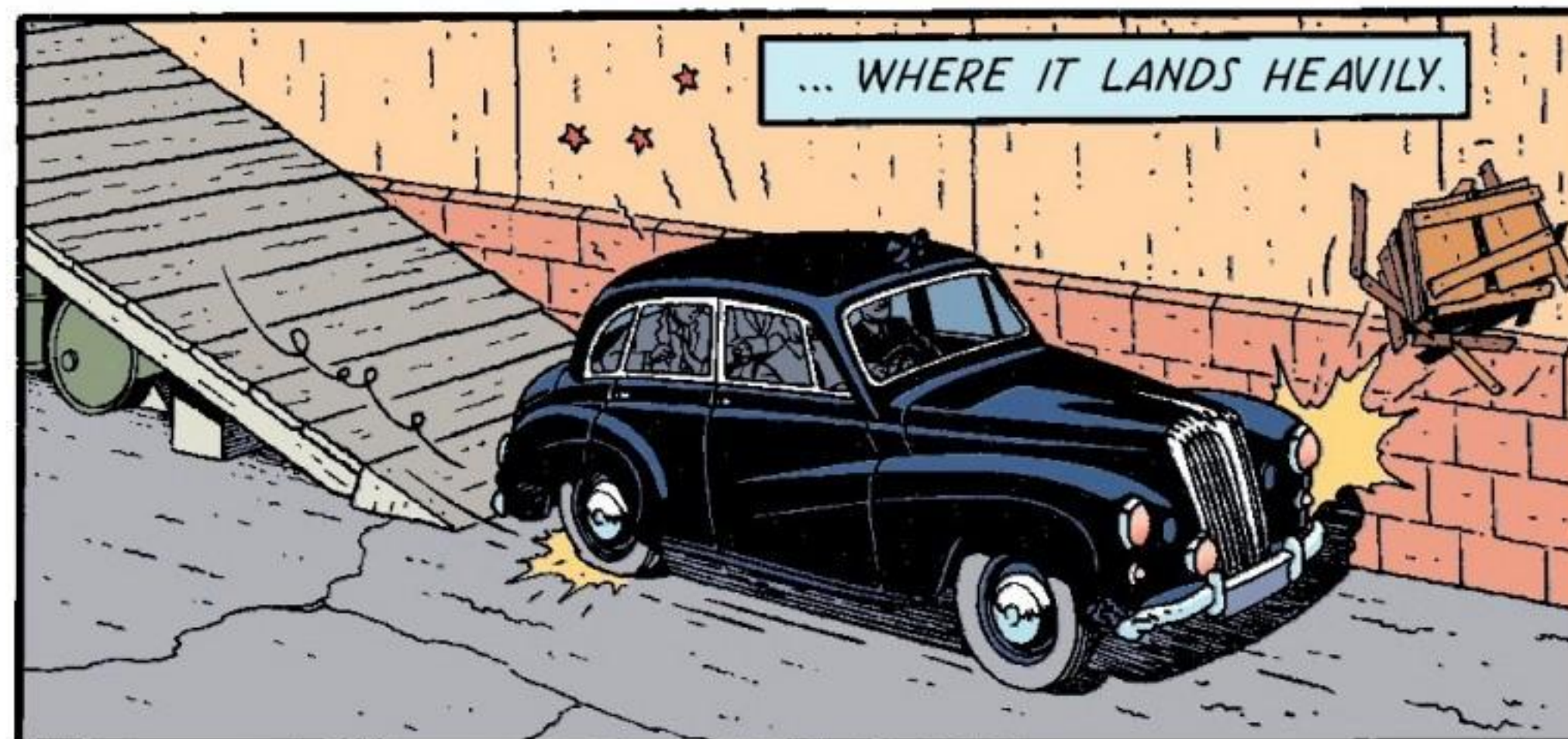
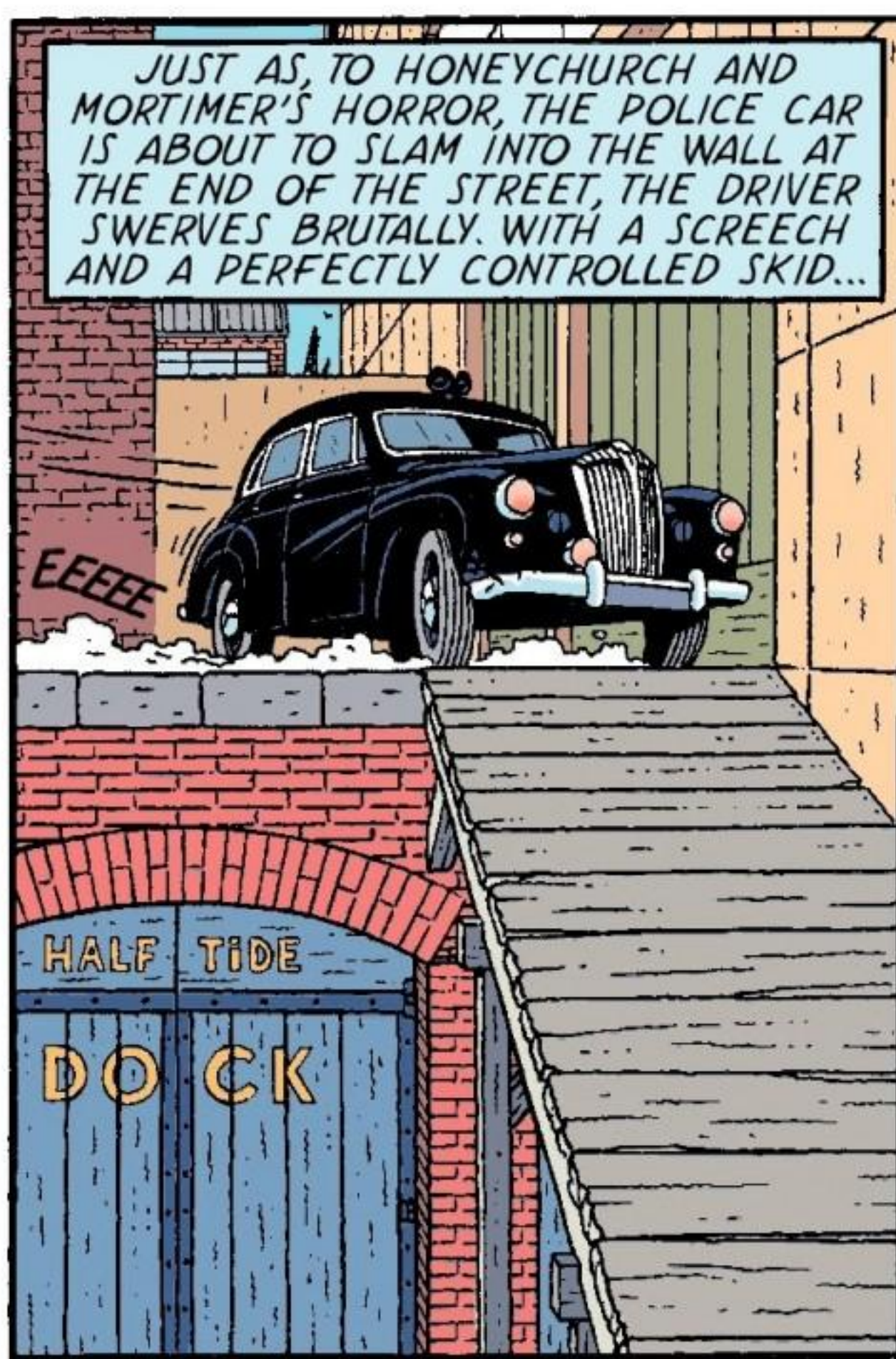
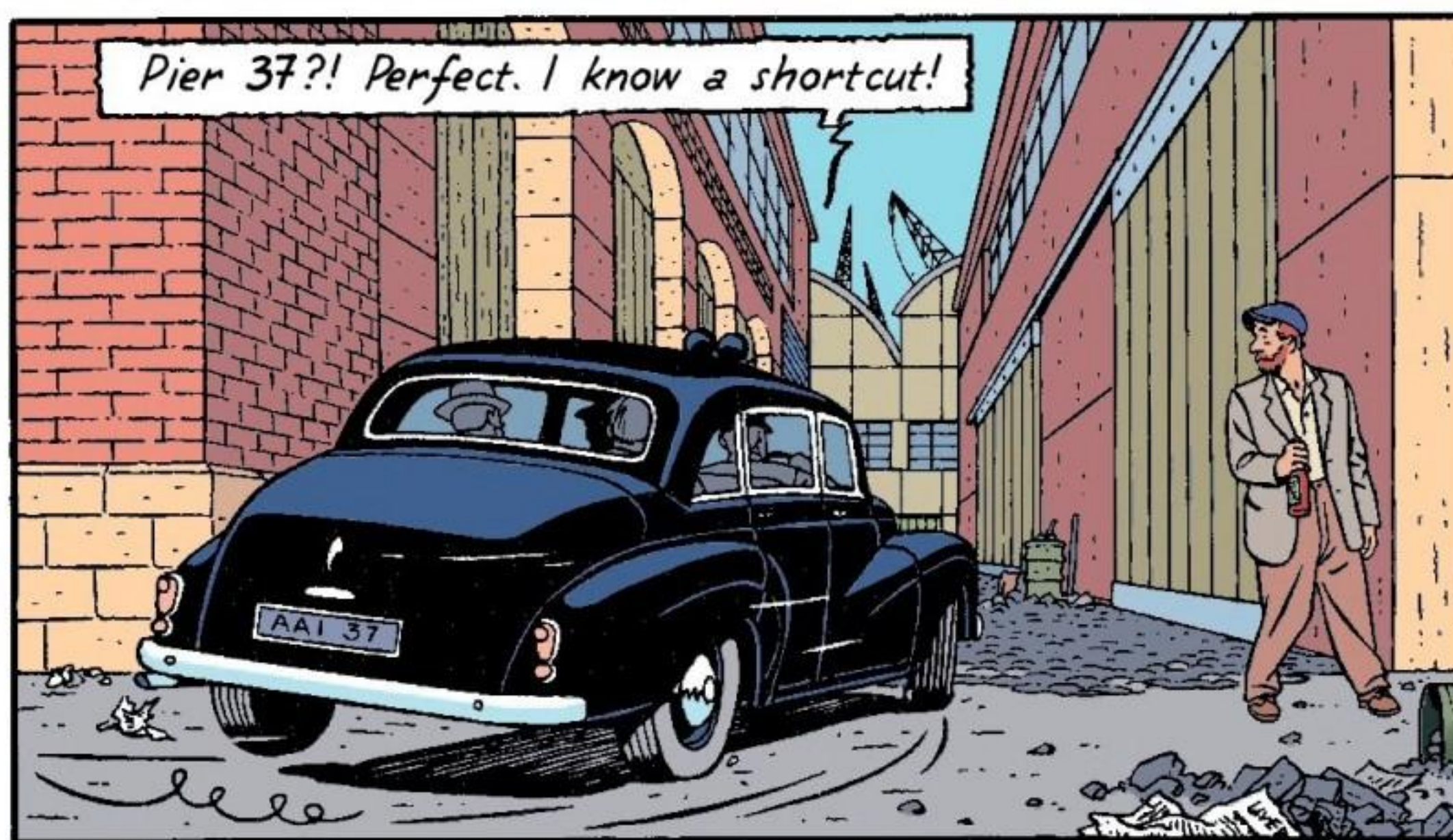
WHILE THE DRIVER WEAVES THROUGH LONDON'S TRAFFIC, MORTIMER GETS LOST IN THOUGHT AGAIN. HE'S CERTAIN OF IT: THERE WAS A RECURRING ELEMENT IN THE PICTURES HE WAS SHOWN... BUT WHAT WAS IT?

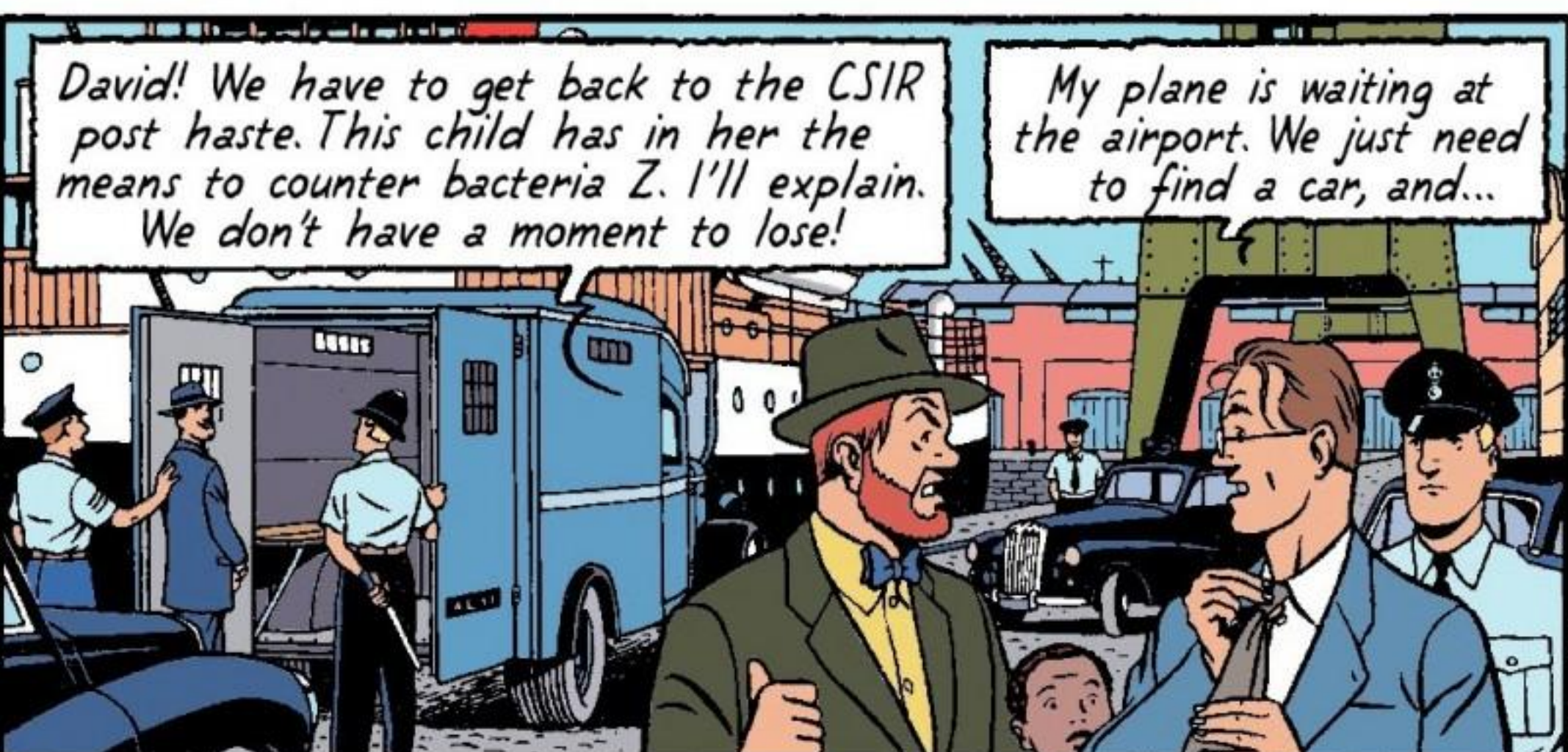
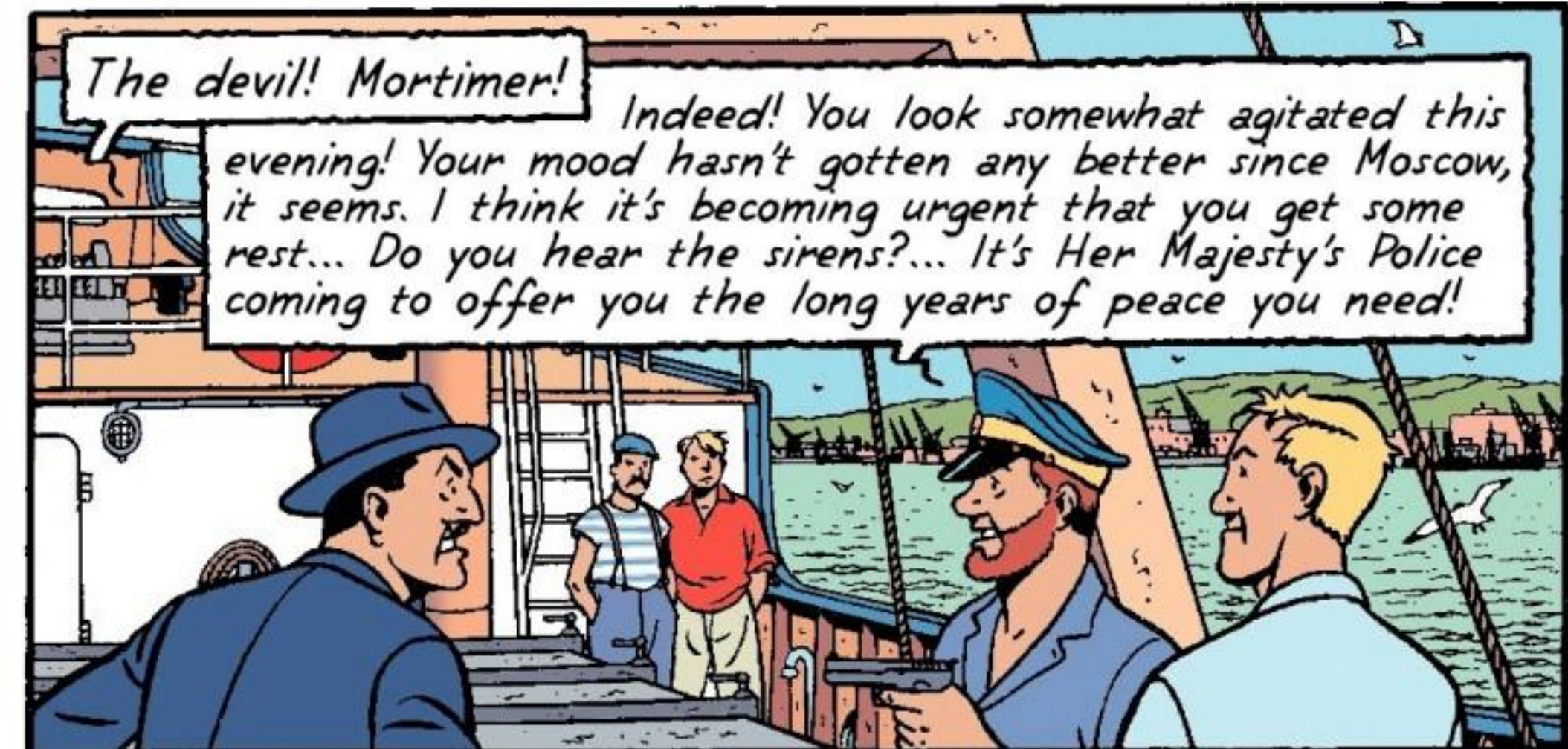
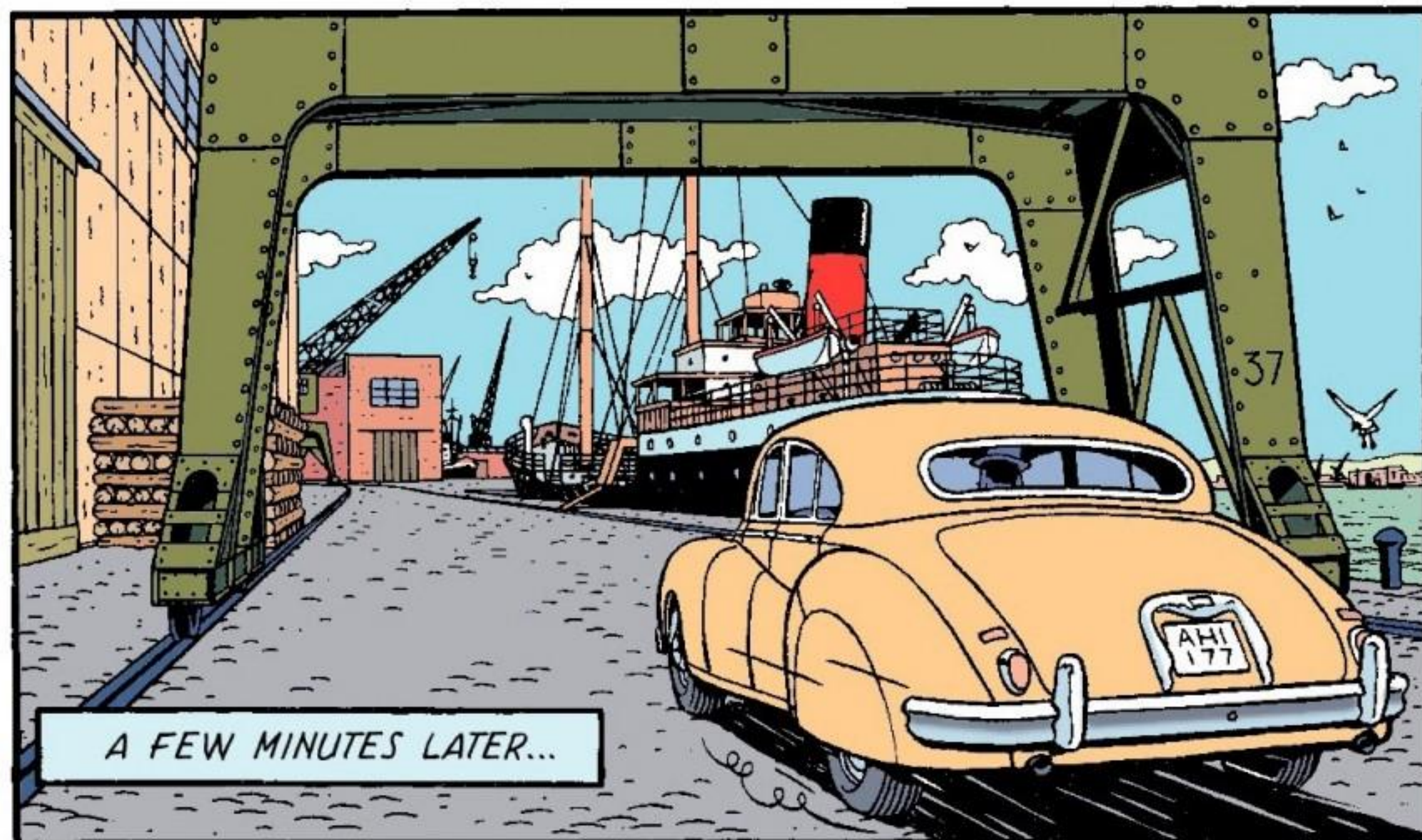












JULY 10, INTELLIGENCE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS...

... so, the children's thymus gland, which protects them from all kinds of viral or bacterial attacks, did its job perfectly against bacteria Z—without being able to prevent carrier subjects from transmitting the disease. A simple kiss from an infected child... and it's certain death for the victim.

But how did you understand that Voronov was using children to get to his targets?

Because of their innocence... which a banal traffic accident highlighted for me. I suddenly remembered how in all the pictures we had watched, those personalities were receiving flower bouquets from... children! I made the connection with the little black girl in Liverpool offering flowers to the Queen. Suddenly, I understood that children must have been the vector for bacteria Z contamination—at the same time I realised that the Liverpool girl must have had some sort of particularity that stopped the transmission... since the Queen was alive! Therefore, I had to get the girl at all costs!

Voronov must have reasoned along the same lines. That's why he sent Olrik to Woolton.

My theory turned out to be correct. This little girl is affected by a rather rare genetic disease found mostly in Asian or African genotypes: SICKLE-CELL ANAEMIA. The disease causes a malformation of the red cells, which prevents some bacteria from reproducing and kills them before they spread to... saliva, for example. Thus, the kisses of the little darling were perfectly harmless!

Incredible!

Today, the vaccine our researchers have perfected using the child's blood will enable us to save any person recently contaminated by bacteria Z—and to protect potential targets.

In the name of our Kingdom, Professor: Bravo! You and your team have done an outstanding job!

Commander? What's the situation on the ground?

Thanks to the secret phone number Miss Sneed used to meet up with her KGB contact and that we passed on to the Soviets, they managed to trace it back to a certain General Orloff. Captain Blake was right: Orloff admitted that Voronov and a few others, all nostalgic for the Stalin era, were indeed plotting to overthrow the current government of the Soviet Union...

... A notebook found in the General's safe allowed them to identify the conspirators and their sleeper agents scattered throughout the Western world. They'll all soon be under arrest, thanks to the combined efforts of the Russians and our allies' police forces.

We can breathe again, gentlemen. The world war that Voronov wanted to weaken the Soviet Union so he could seize power easily will not take place!

One more thing, gentlemen. Captain Blake and I have something to tell you. The Soviet ambassador called this morning... The Russians want us to hand Olrik over to them. They claim they need his testimony to find Voronov more rapidly...

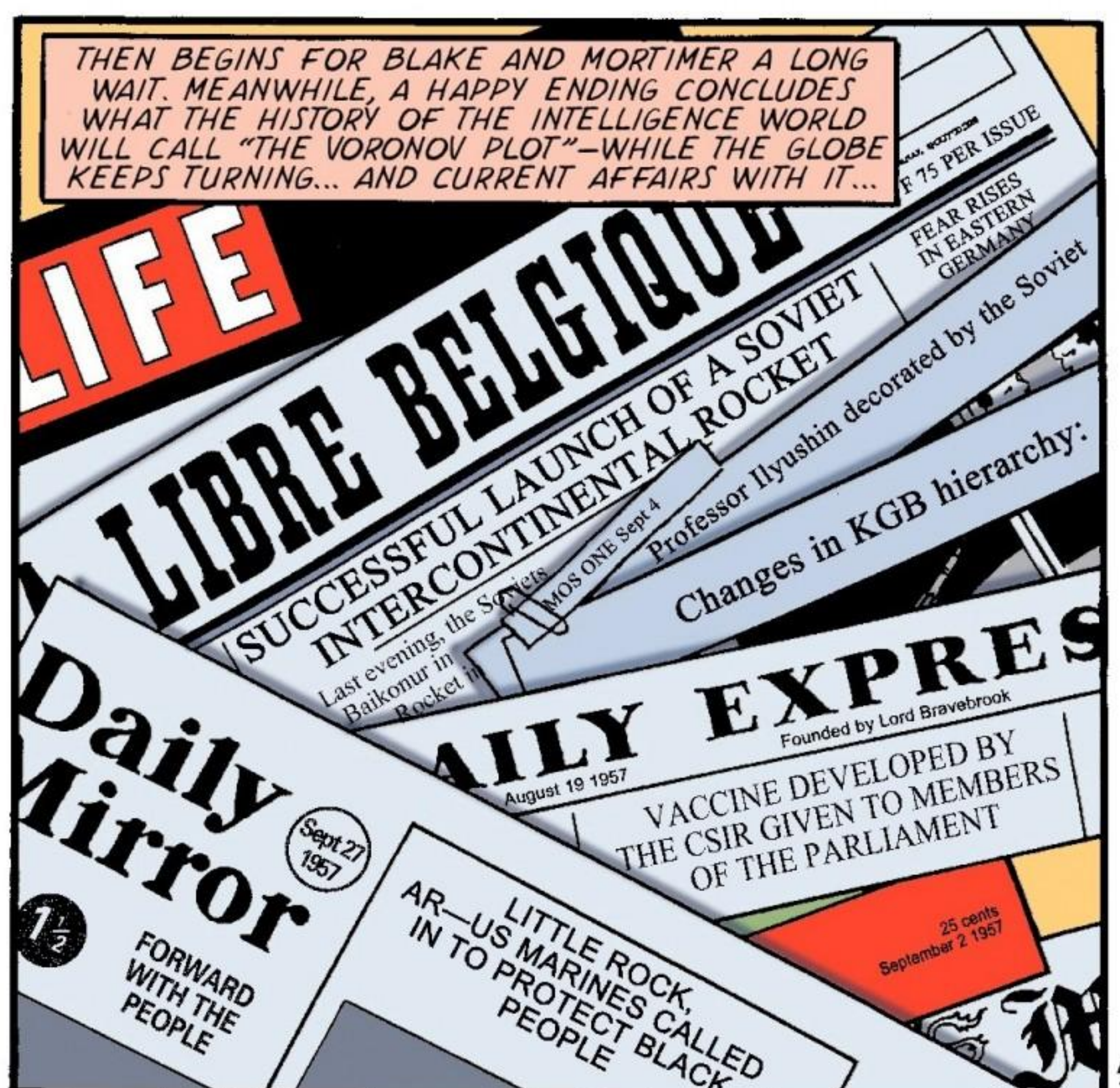
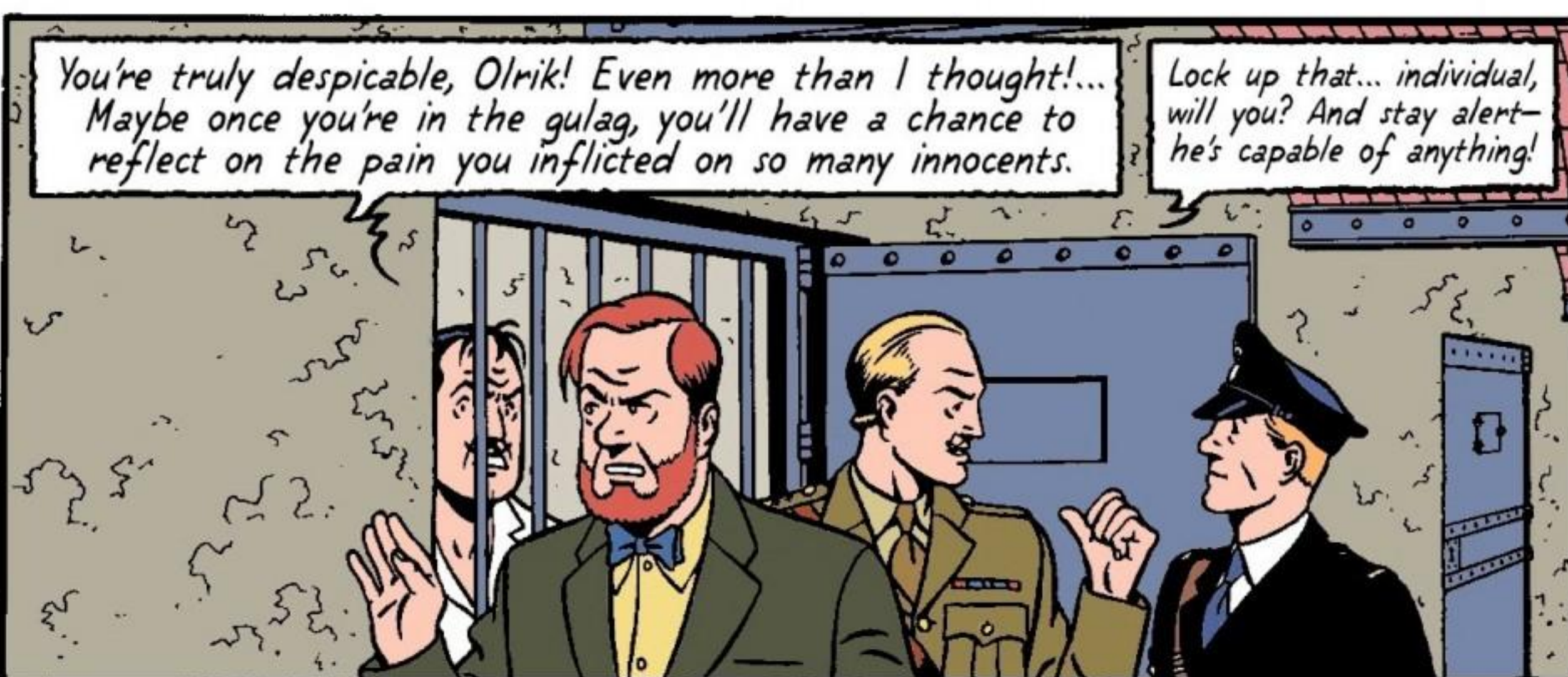
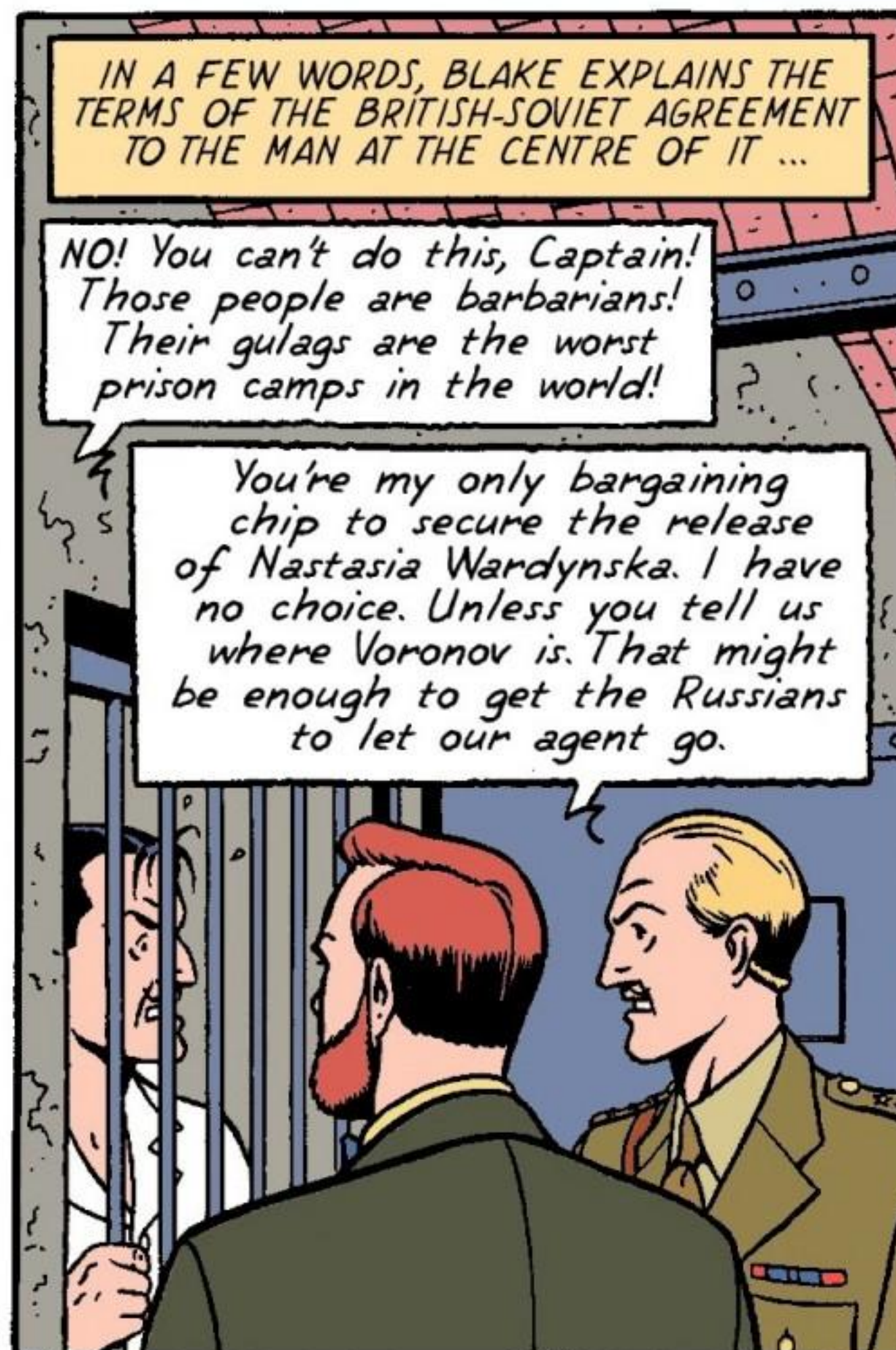
WHAT?!

UNUSED TO DIPLOMATIC HAGGLING, THE FIERY PROFESSOR CANNOT CONTAIN HIS INDIGNATION.

Now that we finally have that bandit, surely we're not going to let the Russians have him and risk seeing him vanish into thin air once again?!!!

I understand your reaction, old chap. But in the current context, with international relations extremely tense, we have to compromise...

However, if it's any consolation to you, Philip... Know that we didn't agree to hand over Olrik without... compensations...





IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT ON OCTOBER 3 WHEN UNUSUAL ACTIVITY BEGINS AT THE BRITISH AND SOVIET GUARDBOUSES OF A BRIDGE ON THE ELBA, WHERE THE RIVER SERVES AS A BORDER BETWEEN THE TWO GERMANY'S...

... SUDDENLY, A FLASH OF LIGHT PIERCES THE NIGHT ON THE SOVIET SIDE...



That's the signal. Answer them that we're sending the prisoner over.

Yes, Sir.



Everything's in order.

Very well. You can send the girl.



IN SILENCE, WITH ONLY THE SOUND OF THE RAIN HAMMERING THE BRIDGE, THE TWO PRISONERS HAVE BEGUN WALKING.



AS IF IN A DREAM, THE YOUNG RUSSIAN DRAWS EVER CLOSER TO THE WHITE LINE PAINTED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SPAN—THE SYMBOL OF HER COMING FREEDOM.

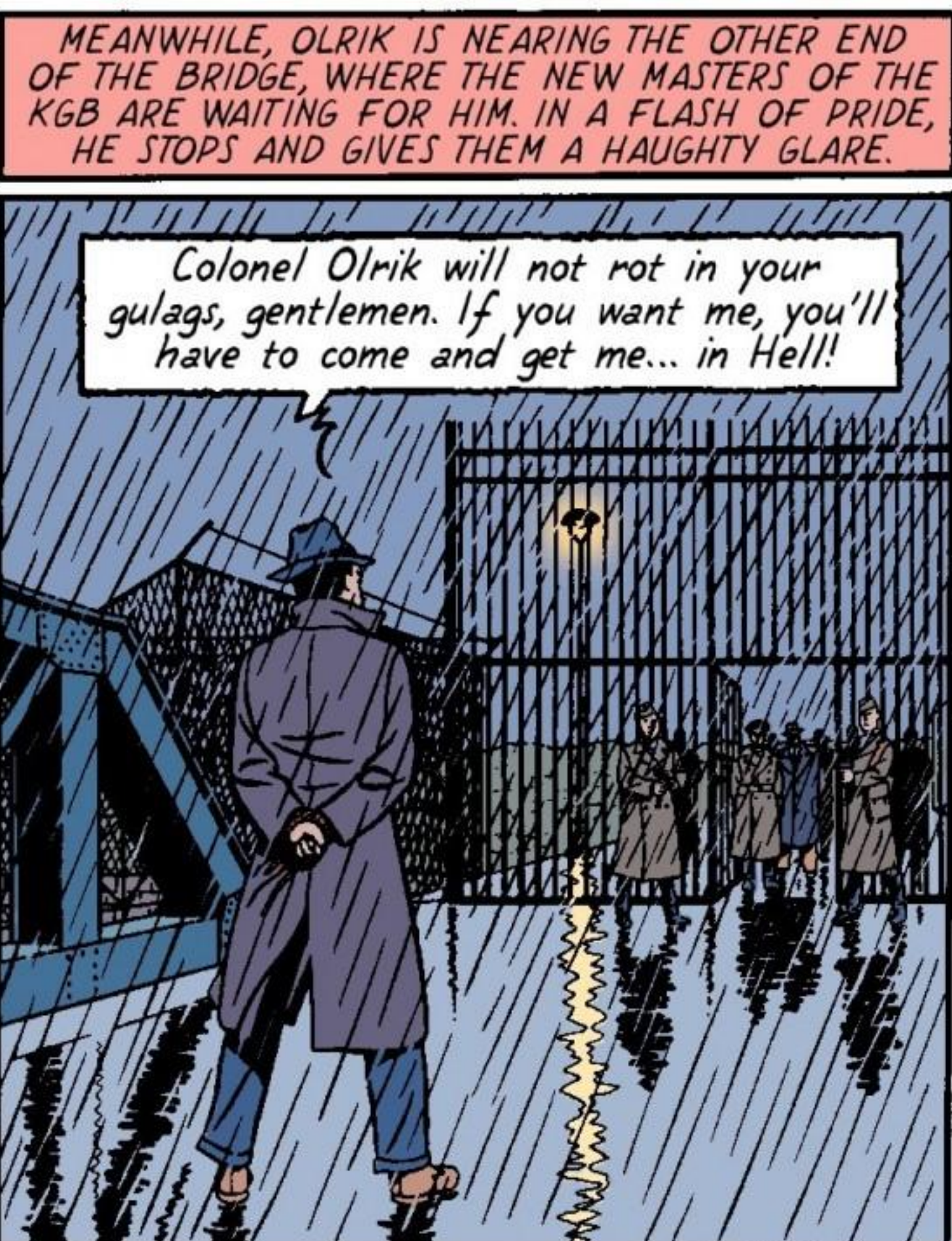


LOST IN HER OWN SURGE OF EMOTION, SHE IGNORES THE LOOK OF HATRED FROM HER FORMER JAILOR AND BEGINS RUNNING TOWARDS HER NEW LIFE.



Oh, Captain! Thank you! Thank you for saving me from these people! I was so scared...

I should be the one thanking you, Nastasia. And the whole world with me! From now on, you'll never have to be scared again. I promise.



MEANWHILE, OLRİK IS NEARING THE OTHER END OF THE BRIDGE, WHERE THE NEW MASTERS OF THE KGB ARE WAITING FOR HIM. IN A FLASH OF PRIDE, HE STOPS AND GIVES THEM A HAUGHTY GLARE.

Colonel Olrik will not rot in your gulags, gentlemen. If you want me, you'll have to come and get me... in Hell!



AND, WHILE THE STUNNED SOVIETS LOOK ON, OLRİK VAULTS OVER THE BRIDGE'S HANDRAIL.

FIRE! Fire at will! Stop him from...



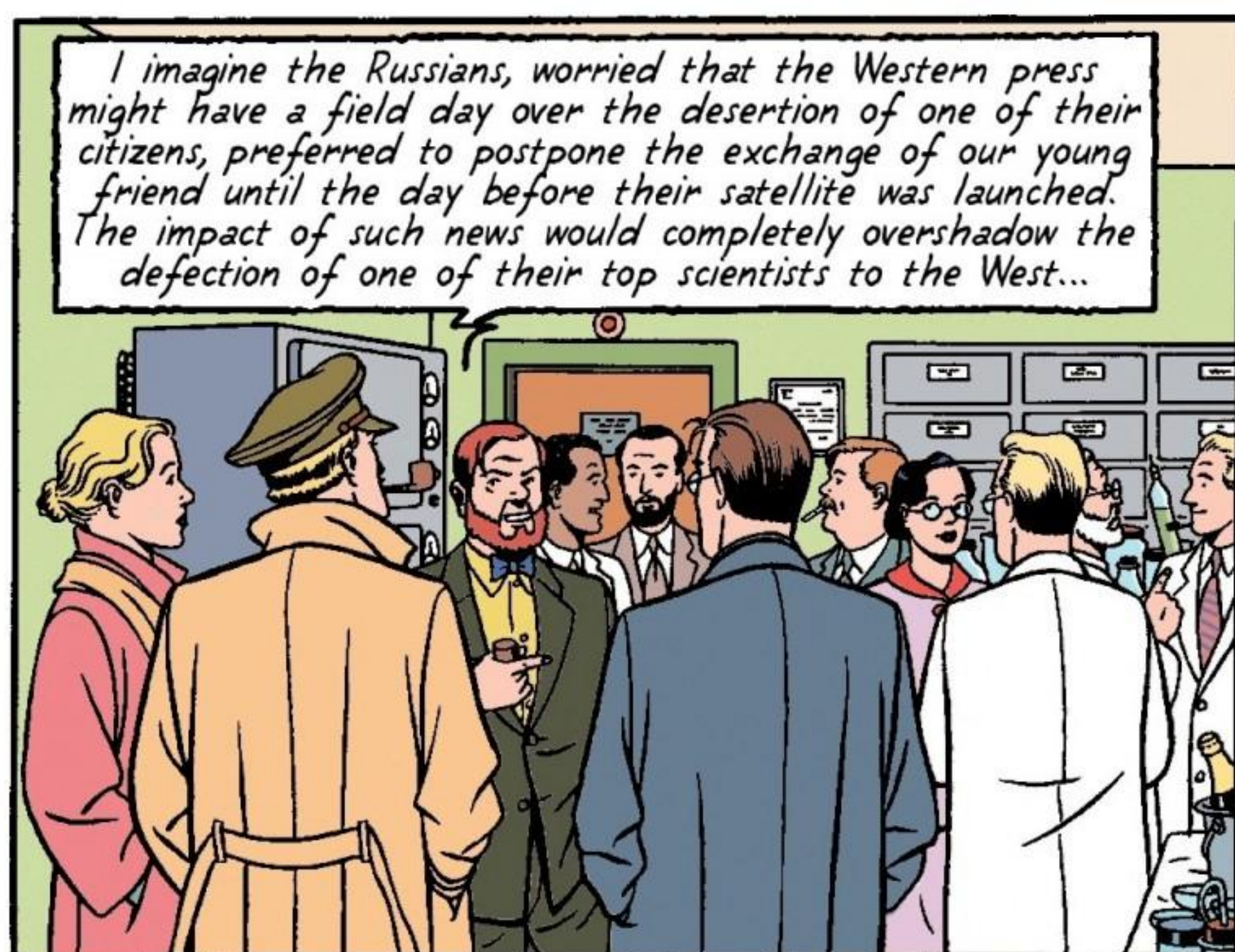
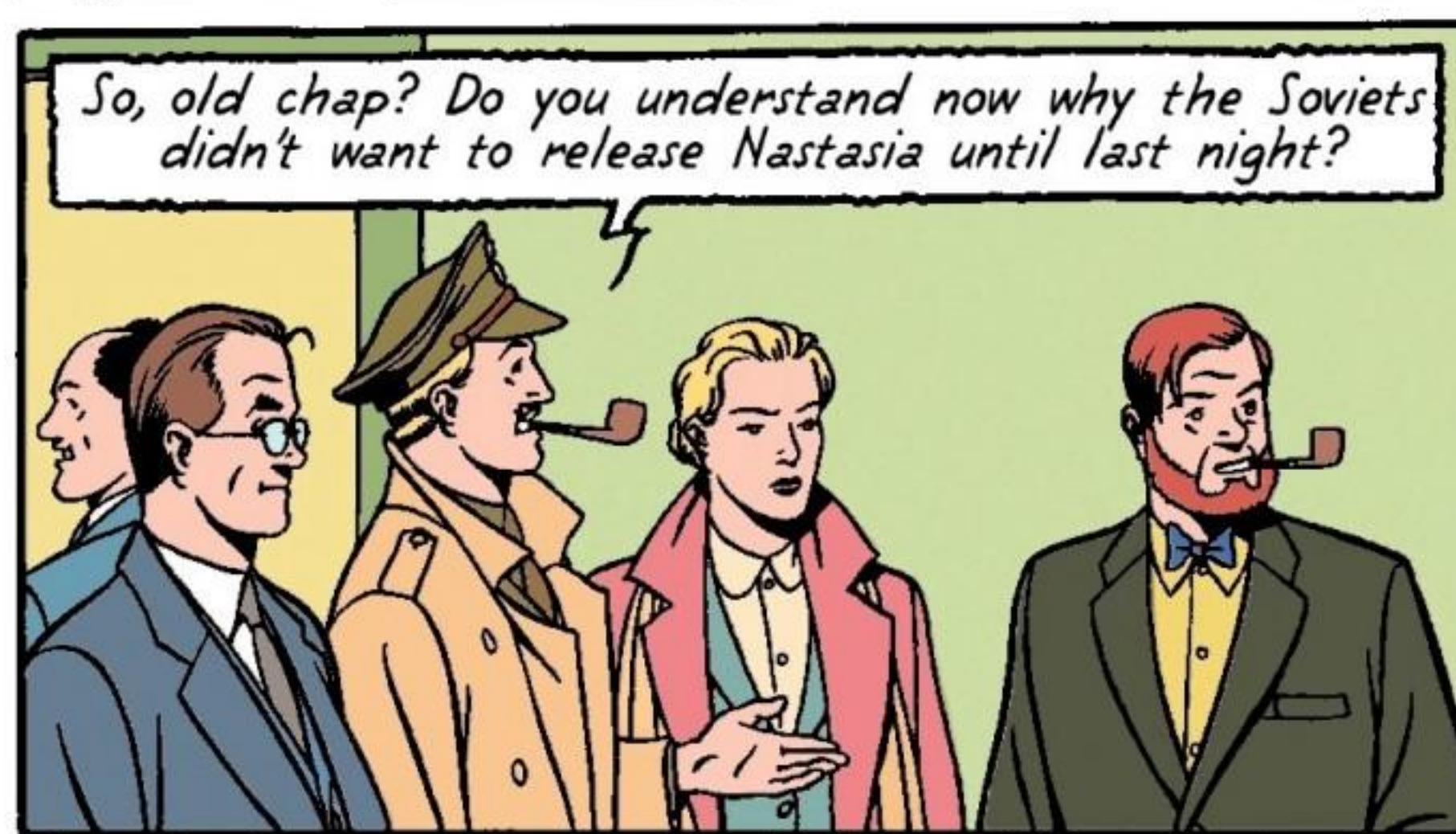
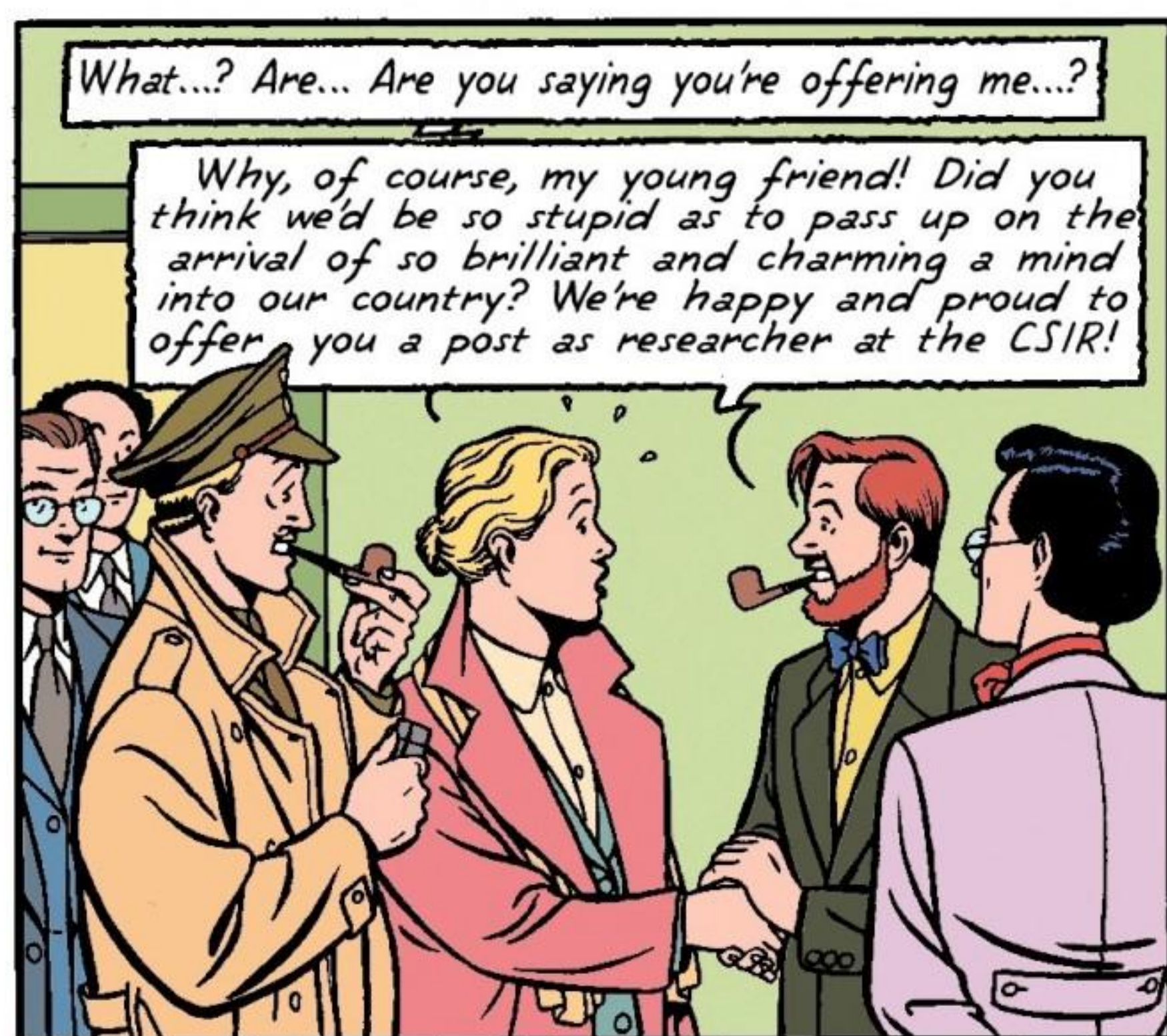
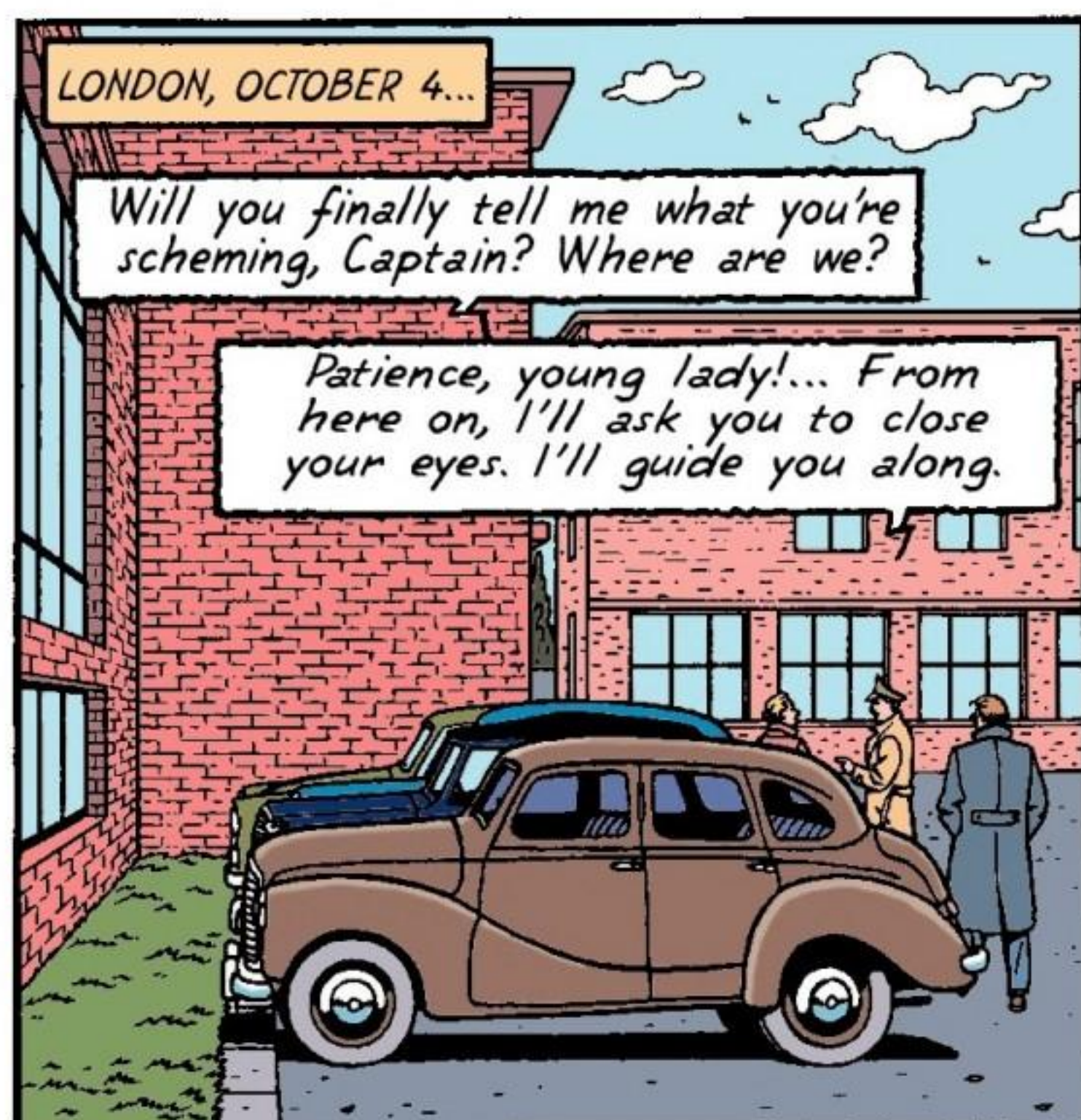
?

Good heavens!



The prisoner!... Do you think they...?

We'll never know, Sergeant. Over there is beyond the Iron Curtain. Come, Nastasia. The plane to London is waiting for us.

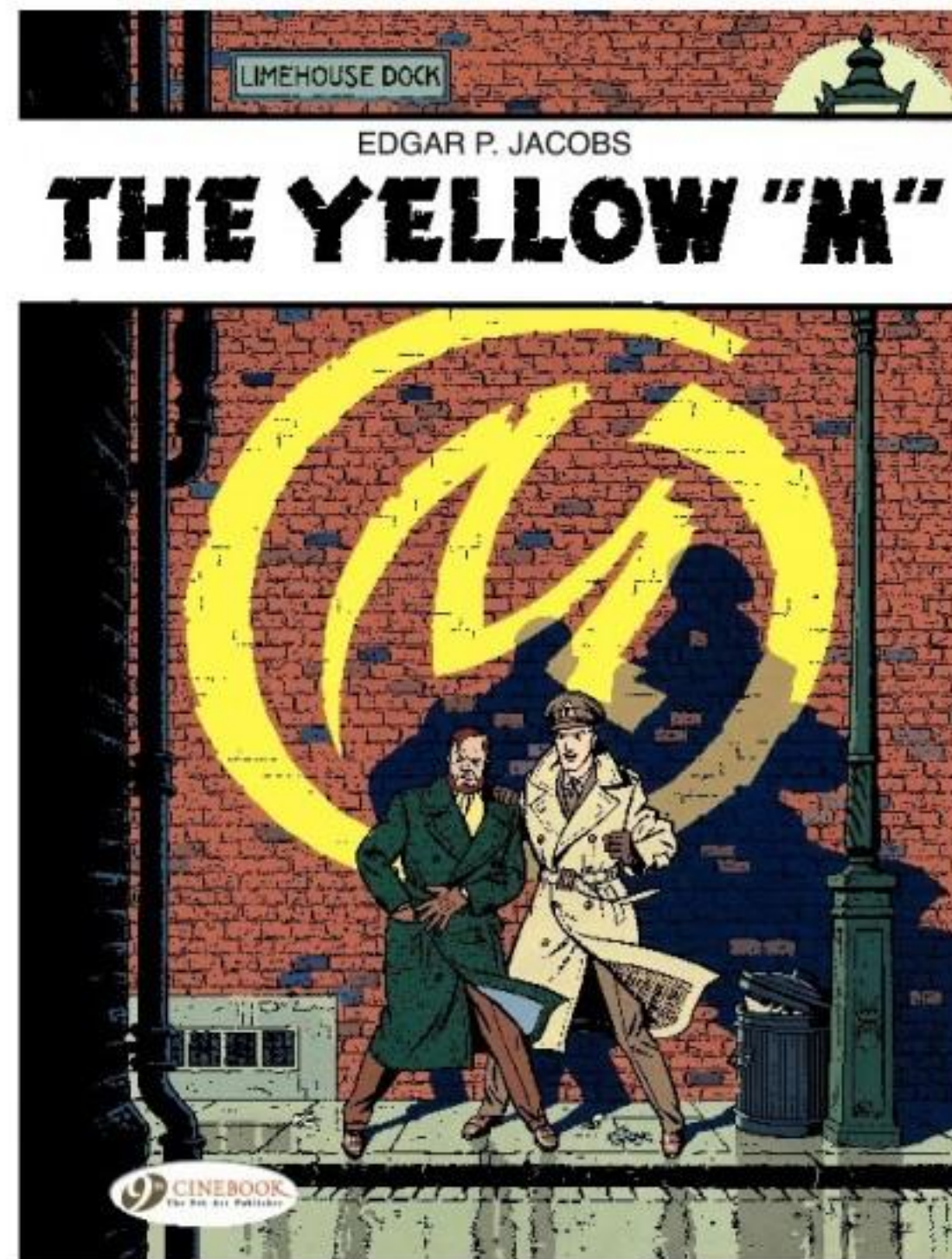


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THE END

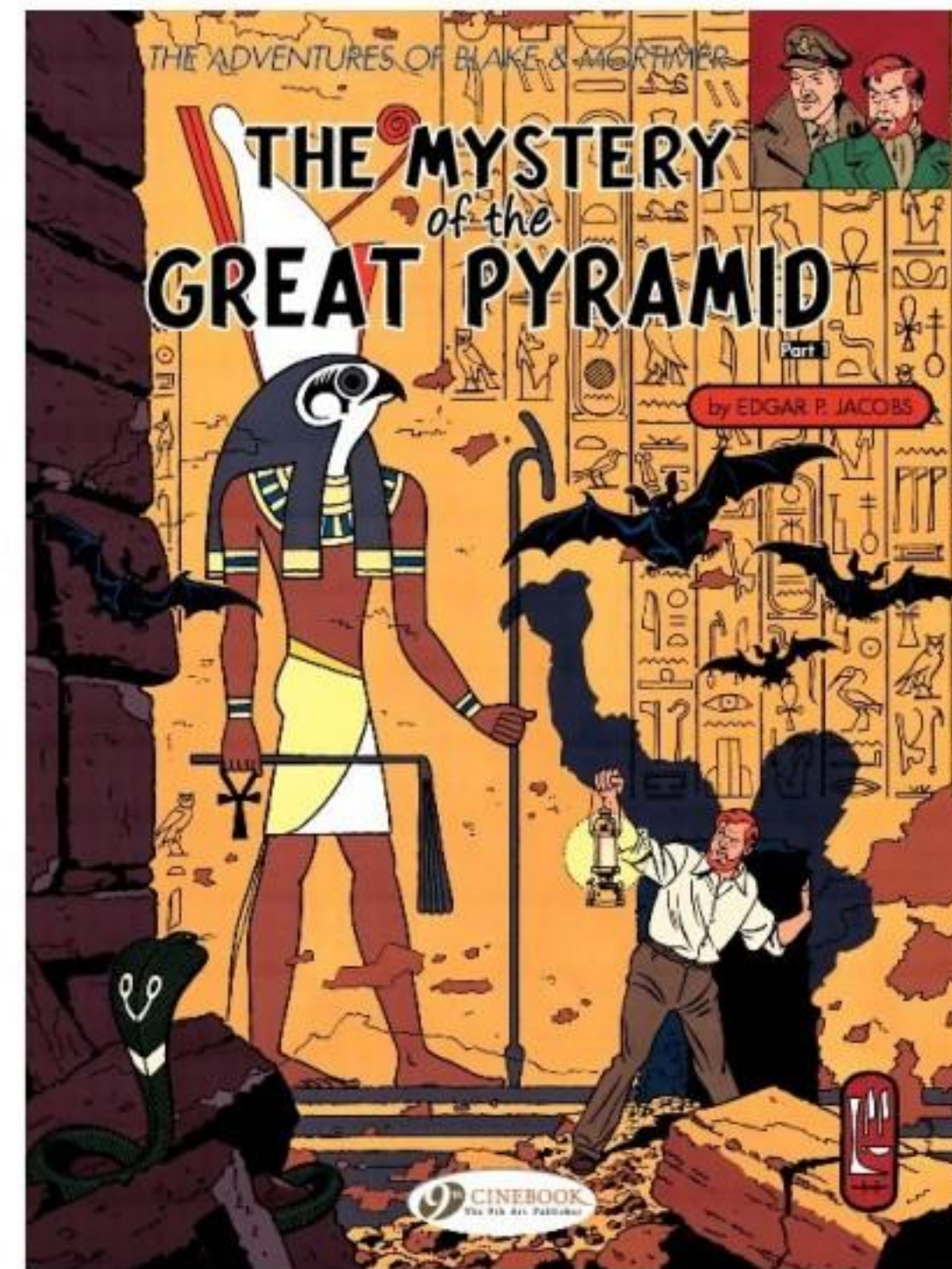
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THE END



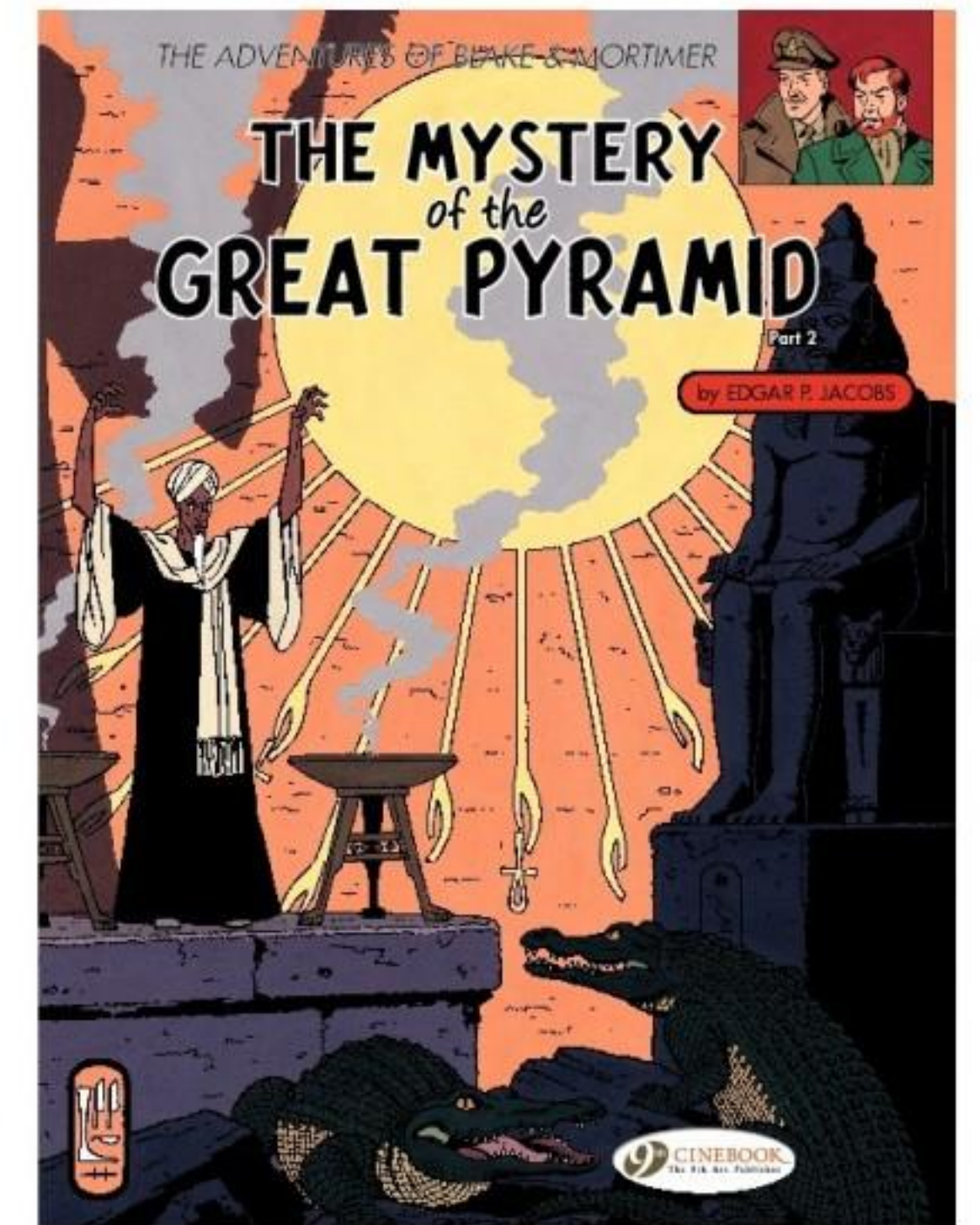
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



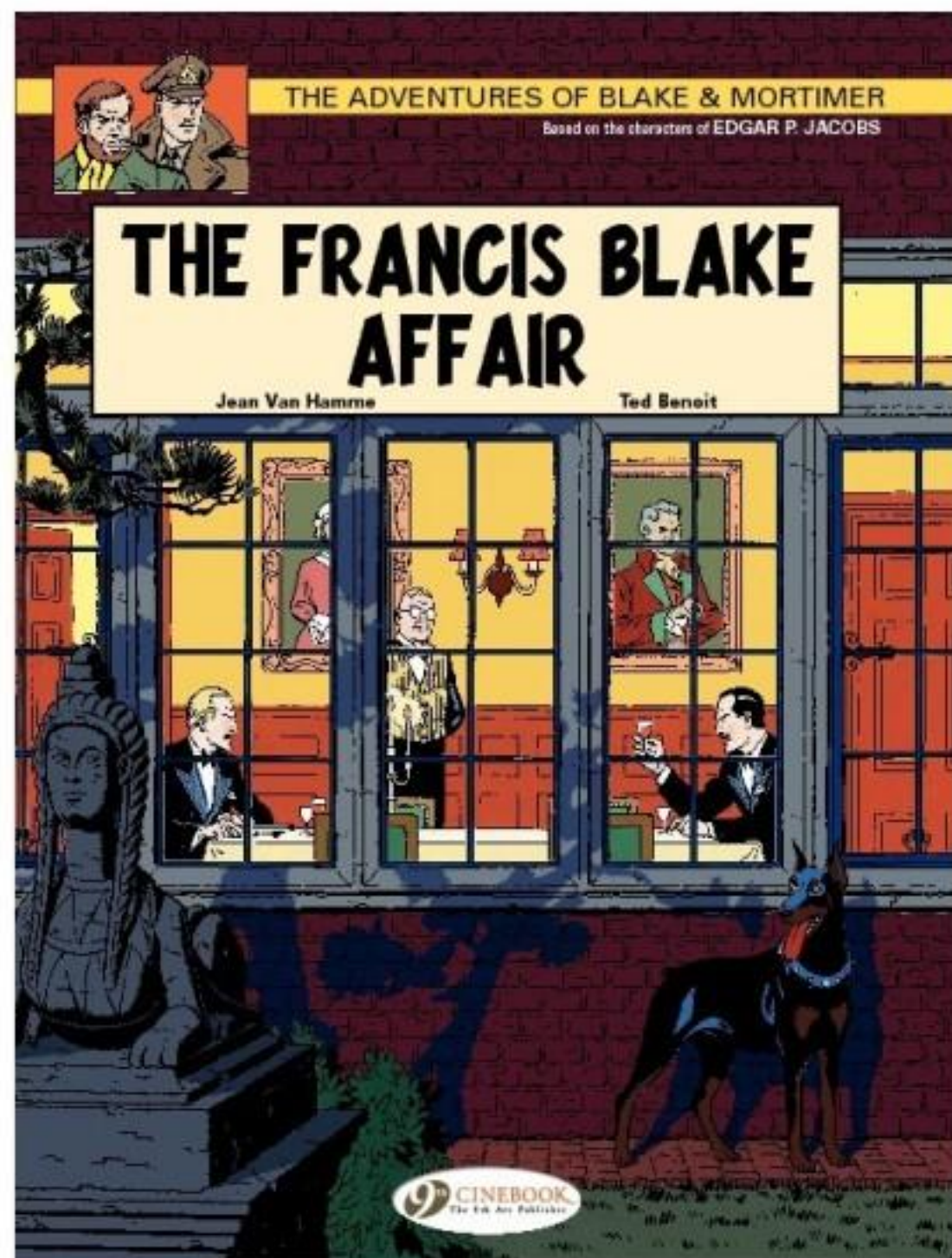
1 The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



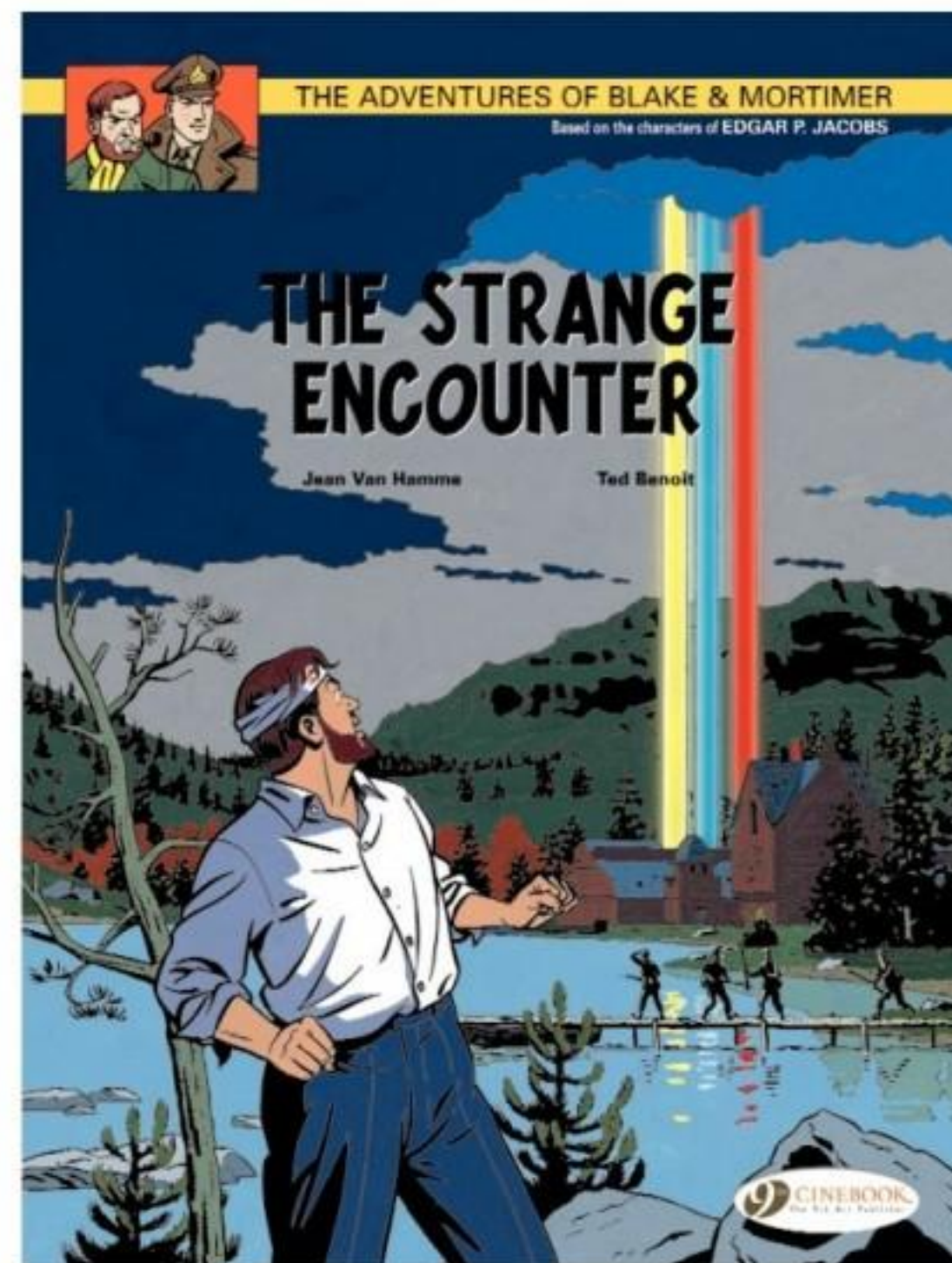
2 The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



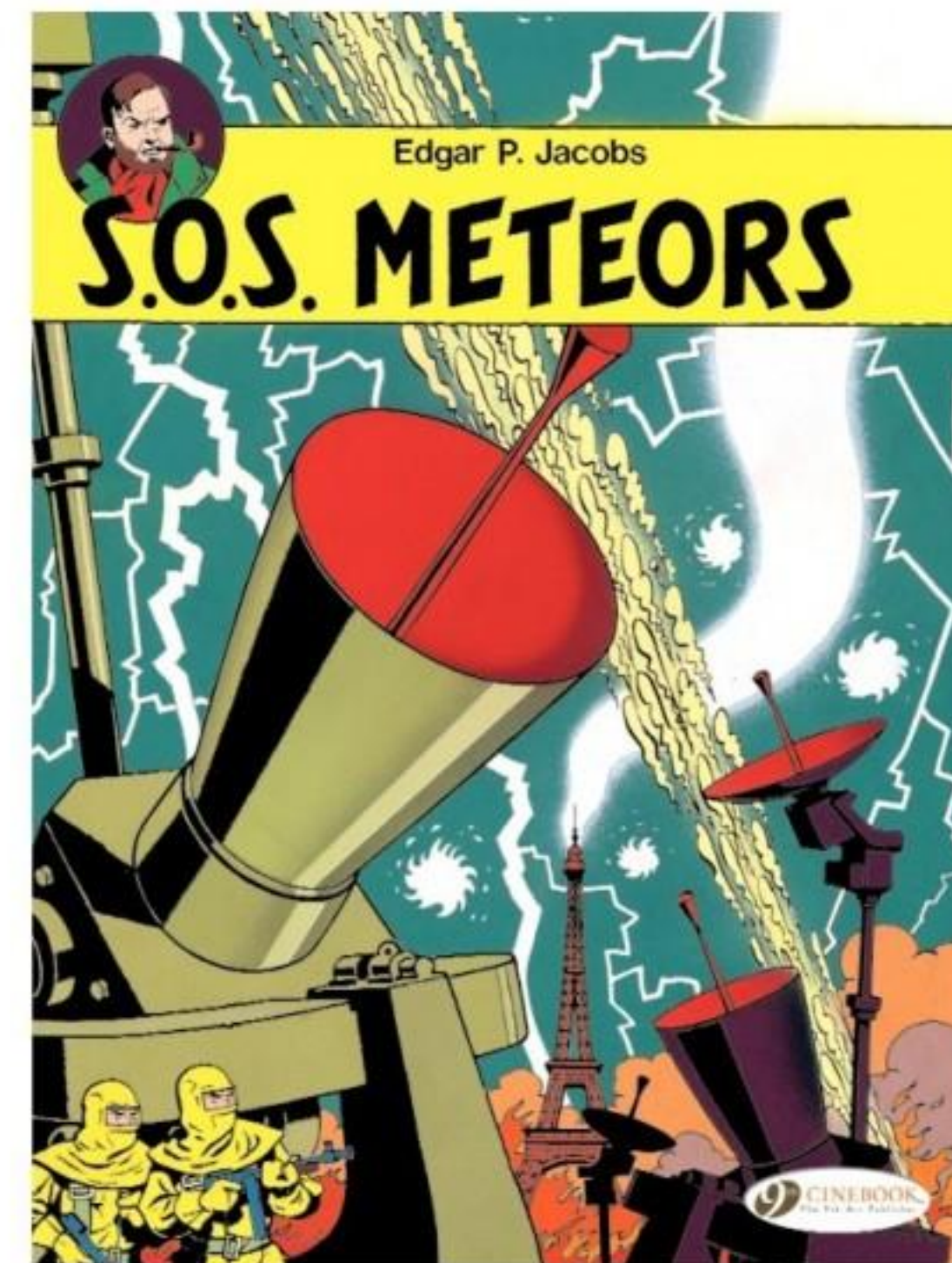
3 The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



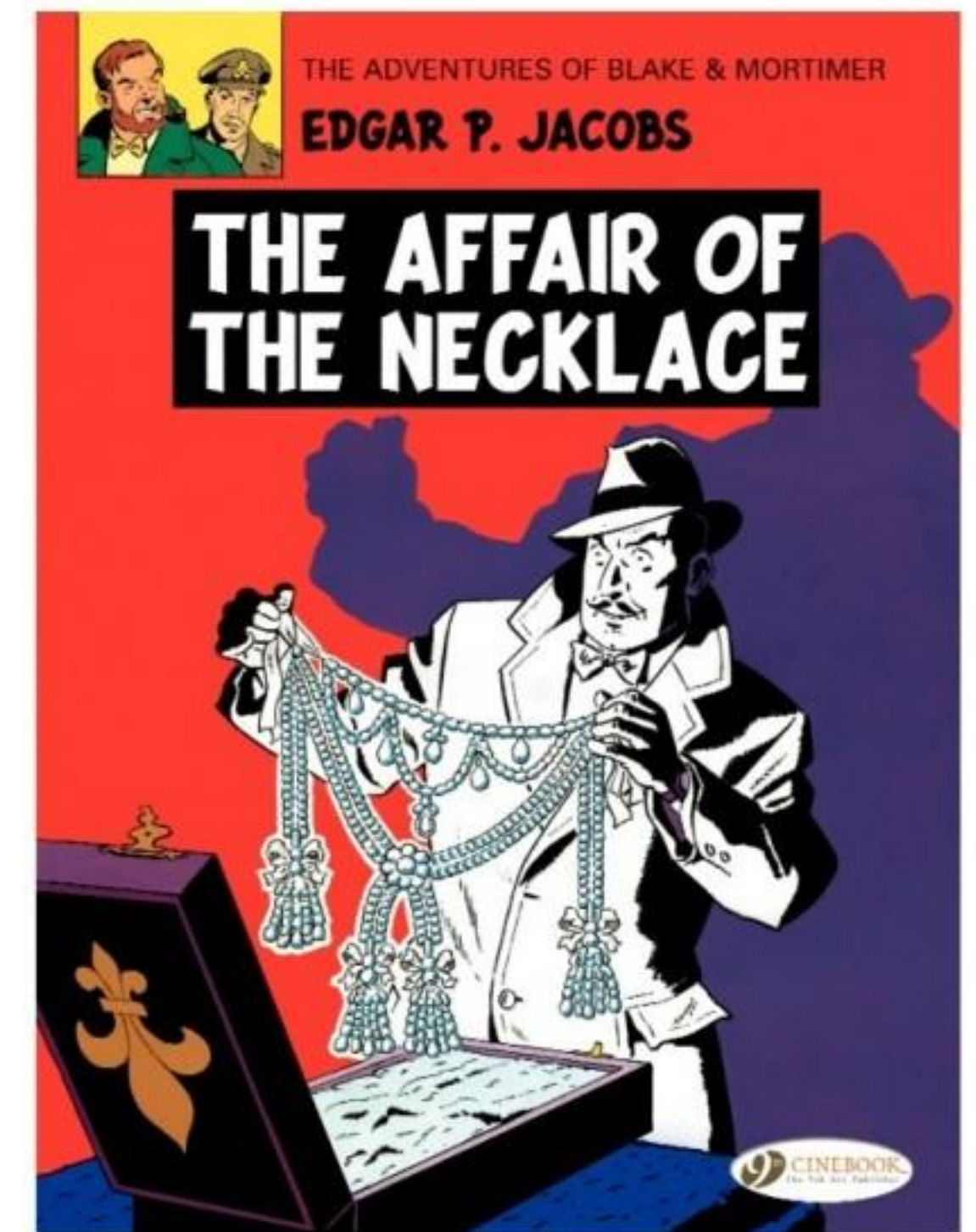
4 The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



5 The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



6 S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



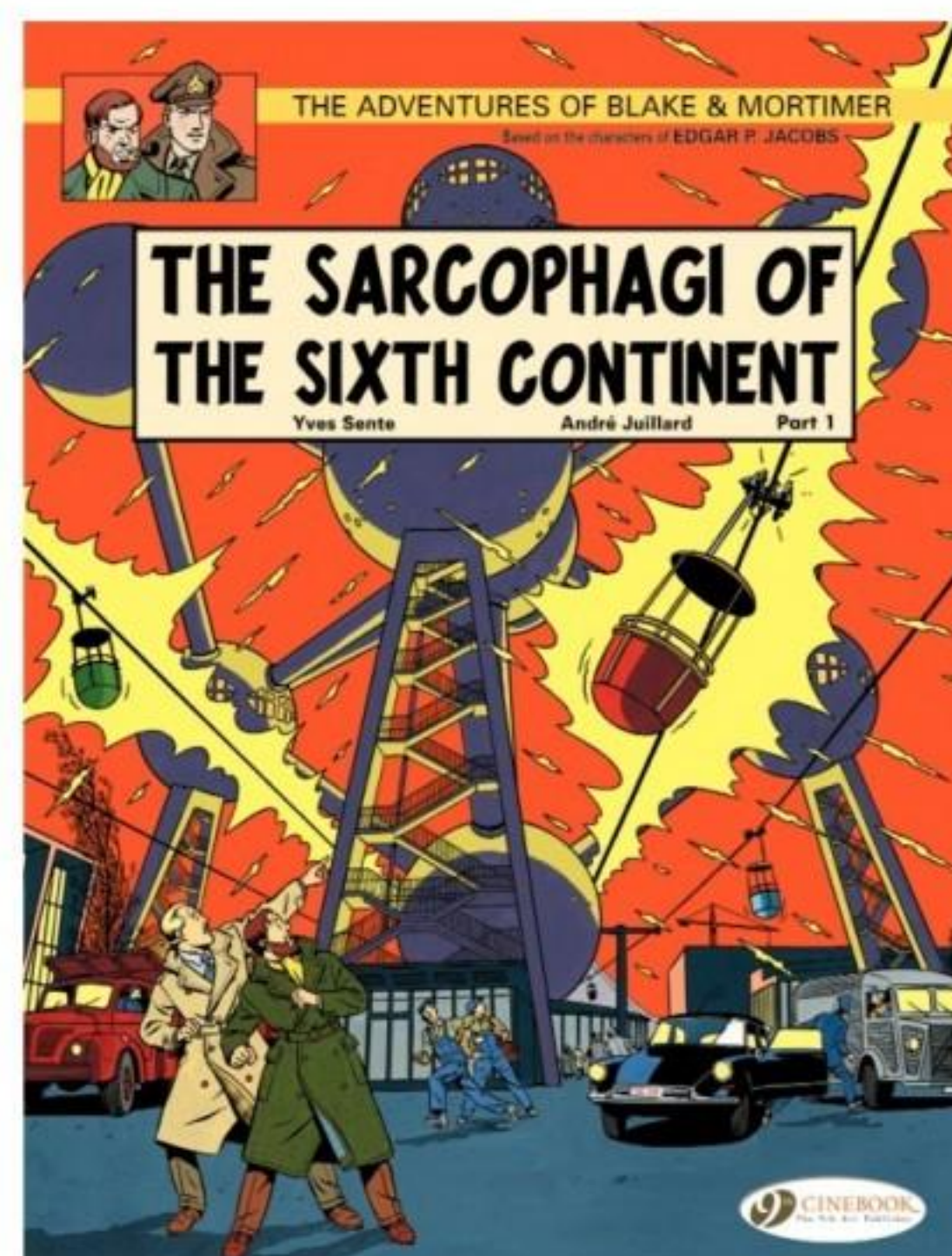
7 The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS

COMING SOON

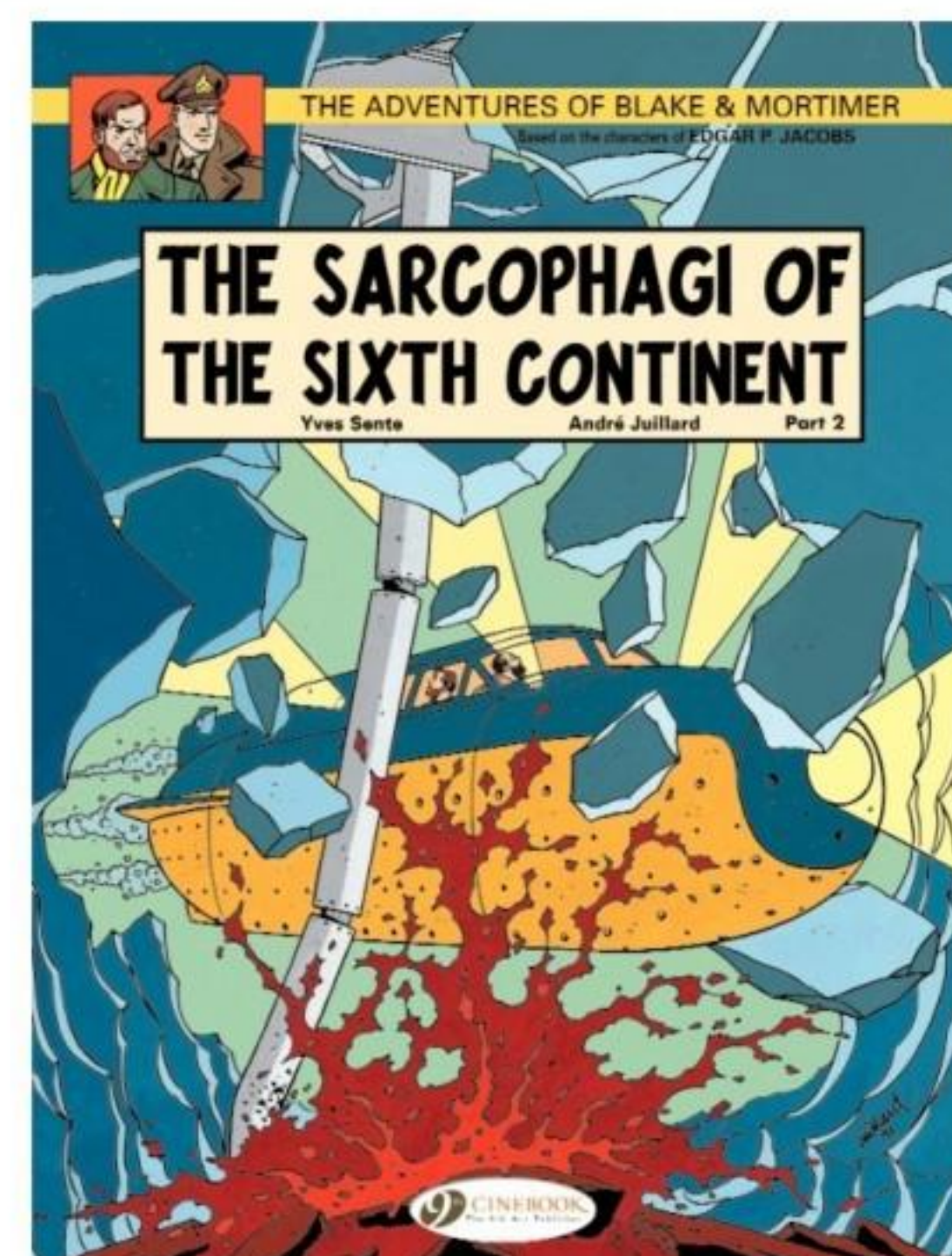
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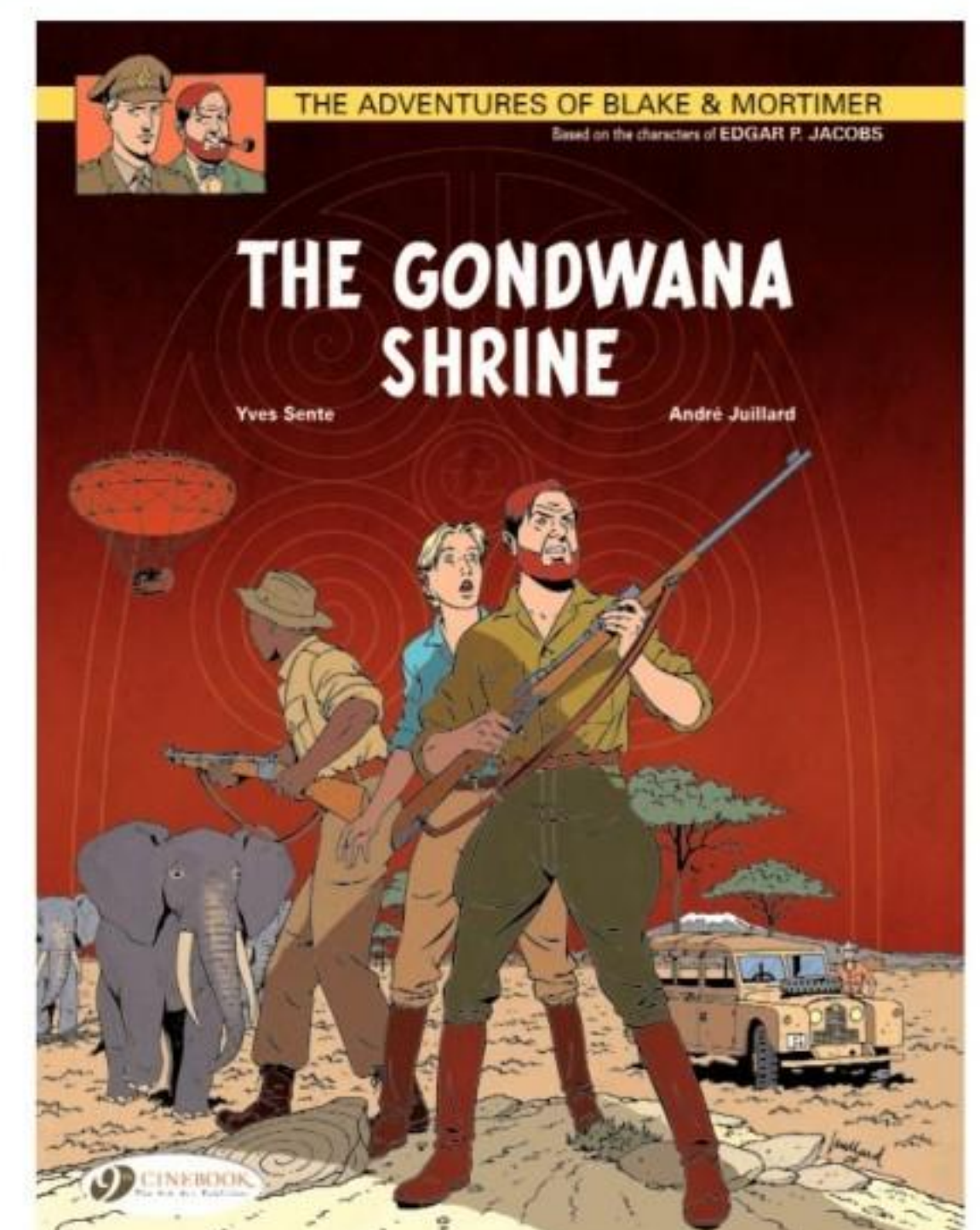
8 The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



9 The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



10 The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



11 The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD



BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE VORONOV PLOT

THE BIRTH OF THE SECOND TEAM

Autumn, 1997. The meticulous, detail-obsessed Ted Benoit is working on *The Strange Encounter*, the second episode of those Blake & Mortimer adventures created by Jean Van Hamme—father of “XIII,” “Thorgal,” “Largo Winch” and “Lady S.” Problem is, the readers are getting impatient.

Yves Sente, publishing director at Editions du Lombard, makes an encounter of his own...

Yves Sente: In our Brussels headquarters, I come across the managing director and he says: “Dargaud is looking for artists to help Ted Benoit with B&M. Do you know any who could fit the bill? We could ask them to draw a page of Jean Van Hamme’s second script to test them.” Thinking back on it later, I ask myself: Why not write a page of a script and propose it to an artist? I can buy it back afterwards; it’d make a nice souvenir... So I get started. And with the test page written, I get caught up in the game. So much so that, by the end of April 1998, I find myself with a full synopsis for a Blake & Mortimer adventure.



In 1984, André Juillard had already drawn Blake & Mortimer after the original creator’s retirement...

André Juillard: It was for a special issue of *Tintin* published in December 1984, in which a whole slew of artists were paying homage to Jacobs. On a single page, I brought B&M back at the scene of their adventures in Egypt—30 years later. They met Nasir, their old manservant, now working for the sheikh

Abdel Razek—the man who brought Olrik down... Jacobs had thanked me for it in a very kind note. It was the only contact between us.

Early in 1998, publisher Dargaud offers to assign Ted Benoit an assistant. But the deal won’t happen. Instead, some time later, Dargaud’s director gives the green light to a project he’s cherished for a long time: setting up a second team that will start creating more Blake & Mortimer adventures.

Yves Sente: During one of my stays in Paris, Didier Christman—then editorial director at Dargaud—shows me a script. Good, but too directly inspired—almost a ripoff of the already published stories. Now I tell myself: “This is your chance, take it!” I offer to send him a script I pretend to have received from Brussels. A week later, I’m back in Paris, where Christman tells me: “Your writer is completely insane!” I turn green... “Yeah, his story is Machiavellian, superb. It’s just what we need!” Now I turn pink... The scenario he’s just read is mine, of course...

André Juillard: In 1987, the Jacobs Foundation had asked me to draw Volume 2 of “Professor Sato’s Three Formulae”... While very flattered, I nonetheless refused. I didn’t feel up to it back then. I let that chance slip away. When Dargaud contacted me in 1998, I didn’t hesitate for long. The project was fascinating because it brought Jacobs’ heroes back to life within the nostalgic setting of the Fifties. Icing on the cake: My graphic bible had to be the legendary *Yellow M*.

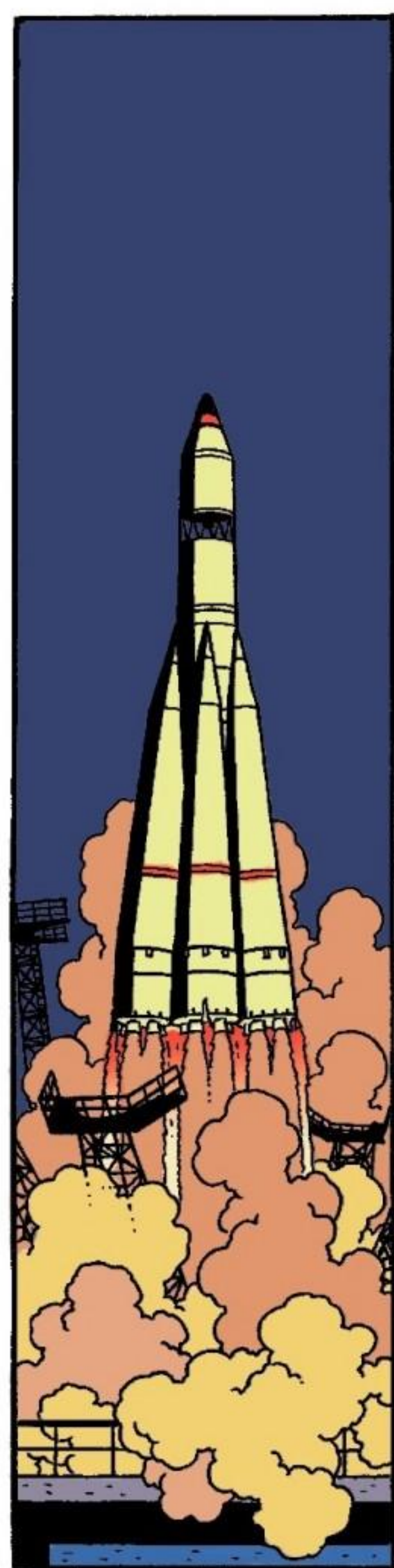


YVES SENTE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE VORONOV PLOT

AND NOW, TO WORK...

Don't go thinking that writer Yves Sente had to wrack his brain for ages in order to find the background of *The Voronov Plot*...



Yves Sente: When I decided to write a test page for the artists interested in taking over Blake & Mortimer (see above), I had to think of a spot located in Great Britain in the Fifties... an area of time and space I knew very little about. As chance would have it, I had just read a short book recounting the historical day when John Lennon and Paul McCartney met for the first time. It was in Liverpool, on July 6, 1957. They were 17 and 15, respectively. Everything was described in great detail. I could "see" the place—and therefore I could animate the character "the Jacobs way!" Afterwards, when I decided to imagine what could have happened before and after that page, all I had to do was to pick things in the news of the year—one that was particularly rich in dramatic, fascinating events. I loved it. It reminded me

of my university years. I majored in International Business...

Drawing Blake? A real heartbreak!

André Juillard: While I got the hang of Mortimer easily enough, I had a horrible time of it with Blake. He took me forever. And I'm still not entirely happy with my work on this character. It's weird: I looked at Jacobs' books closely. He's never drawn Blake exactly the same way twice—and yet, it's always him!

A good, a very good lesson in drawing...

André Juillard: It took me twice as long to draw a page of Blake & Mortimer as other books. Four days instead of two for my usual productions! And I had to be much stricter with my work. The result is that I discovered faults in my style that I'd never noticed before. Now I see them straight away. For example, my characters lacked symmetry—and, for some reason, shoulders. How could I have made such mistakes for so long without realising it?

THE STAKES: SPACE

1957, the Treaty of Rome, Sputnik...

Yves Sente: The tradition in Blake & Mortimer is never to indicate outright in what year the action is taking place. But Jacobs only wrote stories contemporary to him. You just have to know when he came up with them to know their timeframe. In the last two volumes, the tradition is (almost) respected. You must wait until page 37 of *The Francis Blake Affair* to find a calendar showing the date of June 19, 1954. All through *The Voronov Plot*, events are mentioned that are well known but undated. For example, when Mortimer rants at Great Britain for not signing the first European economic and scientific agreement... it's obviously the Treaty of Rome. At the end of the book, the first Russian Sputnik is mentioned. That was launched into orbit on October 4, 1957.





BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE VORONOV PLOT

REALITY CATCHES UP

No good story without good documentation...

Yves Sente: Back at the university, I made some friends in very different areas of expertise. For instance, I had the opportunity to explain my script to a radiologist friend and her husband—a high-calibre lung specialist at the Erasmus University Hospital in Brussels. They offered me the sickle-cell anaemia on a silver platter!

... or attention to accurate details!

Yves Sente: People have told me they've seen a thousand times, on film or in comic form, the scene where the passenger of a car escapes his pursuers by jumping out as soon as the chasing vehicle is out of sight. But it's the first time they see an author worry about how the driver of the fleeing car can shut the door to avoid alerting his pursuers! It's true that it's not simple! But for me, taking such details into account is normal.

André Juillard: It was extremely difficult to draw this scene in the confined space of a small Austin. Fortunately, I had some pictures of that model. But man, what a pain!

A few nods hidden inside *The Voronov Plot*

Yves Sente: I allowed myself a couple. One with Miss Pound—a nod to Moneypenny, the secretary eternally in love with James Bond. That was my homage to Ian Fleming. The other one is a reference to Tintin. On page 55, Olrik kidnaps a little girl and says the same words to her that Müller uses as he kidnaps the son of the emir—page 57 of *Land of Black Gold*. That was my homage to Hergé...

André Juillard: Two, for me! The three characters having a drink at the Centaur Club (page 10) are Macomber, Calvin and Vernay—who Septimus wanted to enslave in *The Yellow M*. On page 19, the secretary of the British embassy—turned by the KGB—goes into “a Moscow restaurant” as the script states. I amused

myself by recreating the one into which Tintin goes on page 4 of *King Ottokar's Sceptre*. The building front and the owner are the same. That's my homage to Hergé...



IN THE SHADOW OF VAN HAMME

Hard to forget Ted Benoit and *The Francis Blake Affair* when you're drawing *The Voronov Plot*...

André Juillard: Impossible to, actually. Two small examples: I drew direct inspiration from the Centaur Club and Blake's apartment as drawn by Ted. And on page 53, Yves asked me to find some corner of London that wouldn't have been drawn already by Jacobs... or Benoit!

Hard to forget Jean Van Hamme and *The Francis Blake Affair* when you're writing *The Voronov Plot*...

Yves Sente: Even more so since Jean followed the adventure from start to finish! After he accepted my script, Christman set up a lunch meeting in Brussels with Jean. The latter left with my script without knowing who the author was. Some time later, he gave me his opinion: “It's very good, but there are a few technical things—balance, mostly...” That's when I admitted that the scenario was mine. He agreed to “coach” the making of the book. Without ever telling me, “You have to do this or that,” but also without letting anything slide—by showing me my faults, pointing towards possible avenues of pursuit. He's an old hand who knows every trick. He taught me a good few. Without him, the story of *The Voronov Plot* wouldn't be what it is. Thank you, Jean.



DIDIER CONVARD

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE VORONOV PLOT

IN LIGHT OF CONVARD'S COLOURS

It was Didier Convard who inherited the difficult task of colouring *The Voronov Plot*...

You encountered *The Yellow M* when you were little?



Didier Convard: Absolutely! My elder brother was subscribed to *Tintin* magazine, and I discovered *The Yellow M* when I was four! I was starting to learn how to read. The story made a serious impression on me. I was so scared... It was, along with *Tintin*, the big memory of my childhood.

How do you do the colours on such a monument as Blake & Mortimer?

Didier Convard: I chose as my graphic bible... *The Yellow M*, again, which is to me the absolute pinnacle of Jacobs' art. Back then, he used colours that are uncommon nowadays: mixes that resulted in very unique browns, greens or yellows. Unfortunately, as the books were reprinted, those colours were slowly modified. I wanted to go back to them. I have the good fortune of owning an original edition of *The Yellow M*. So, I could scan the art to better study them. Once I felt I had sufficiently immersed myself in them, I closed the book and grabbed my brushes...

Did Jacobs have any tricks?

Didier Convard: Yes, like everyone else. I realised, for example, that he used very simple, primary colours for the backgrounds. Which brought the characters in the foreground into much sharper relief. I think I was faithful to what he wanted. With *The Voronov Plot*, readers are going to find Jacobs' light again.

No personal touches?

Didier Convard: In one detail, maybe: Jacobs didn't alter the lighting on his characters much, whether they were in the blazing sun or darkest night. I did change this somewhat for the sake of credibility. The reader's eye is not the same as it was in 1954.

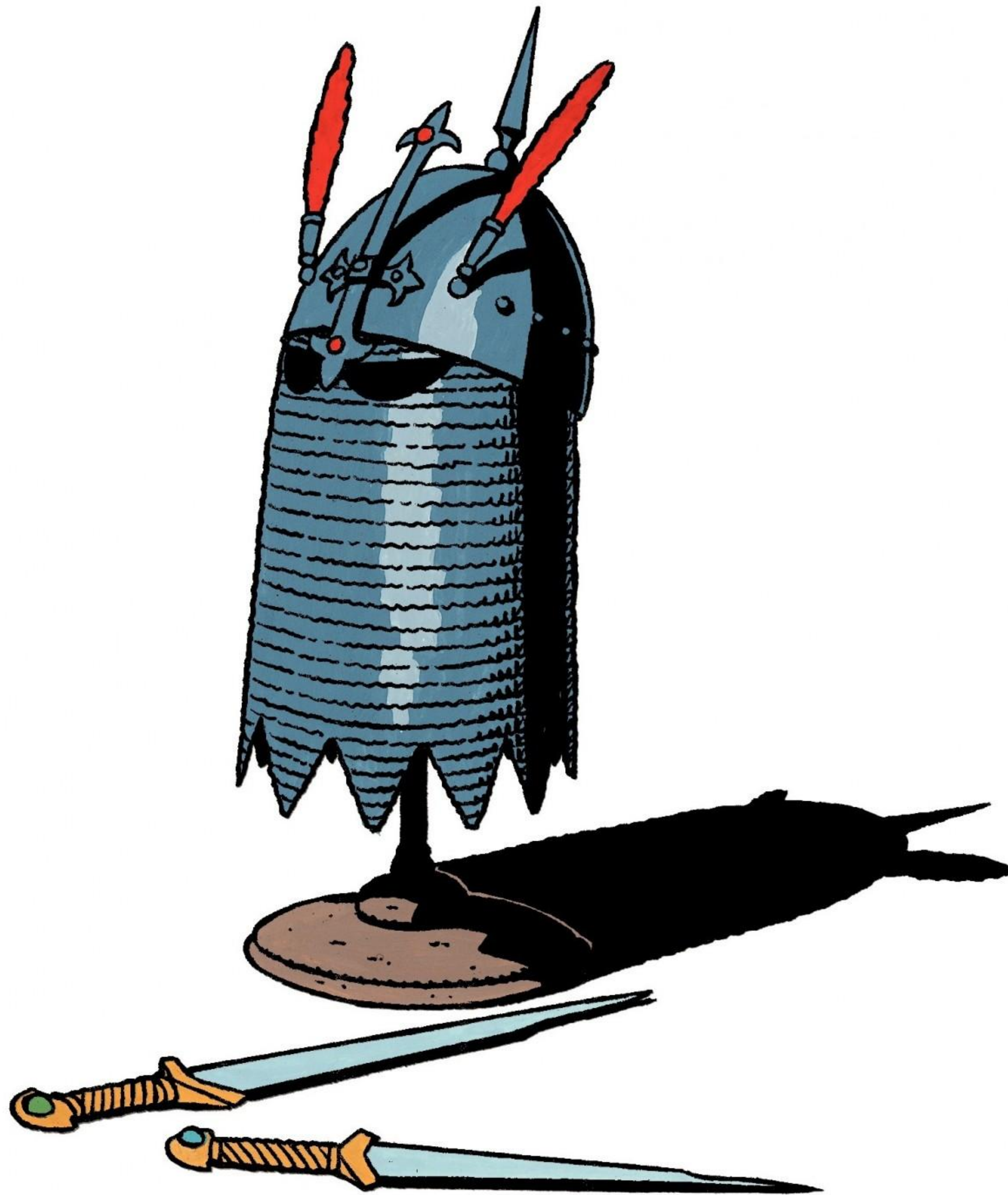


Is it easy to work like Jacobs?

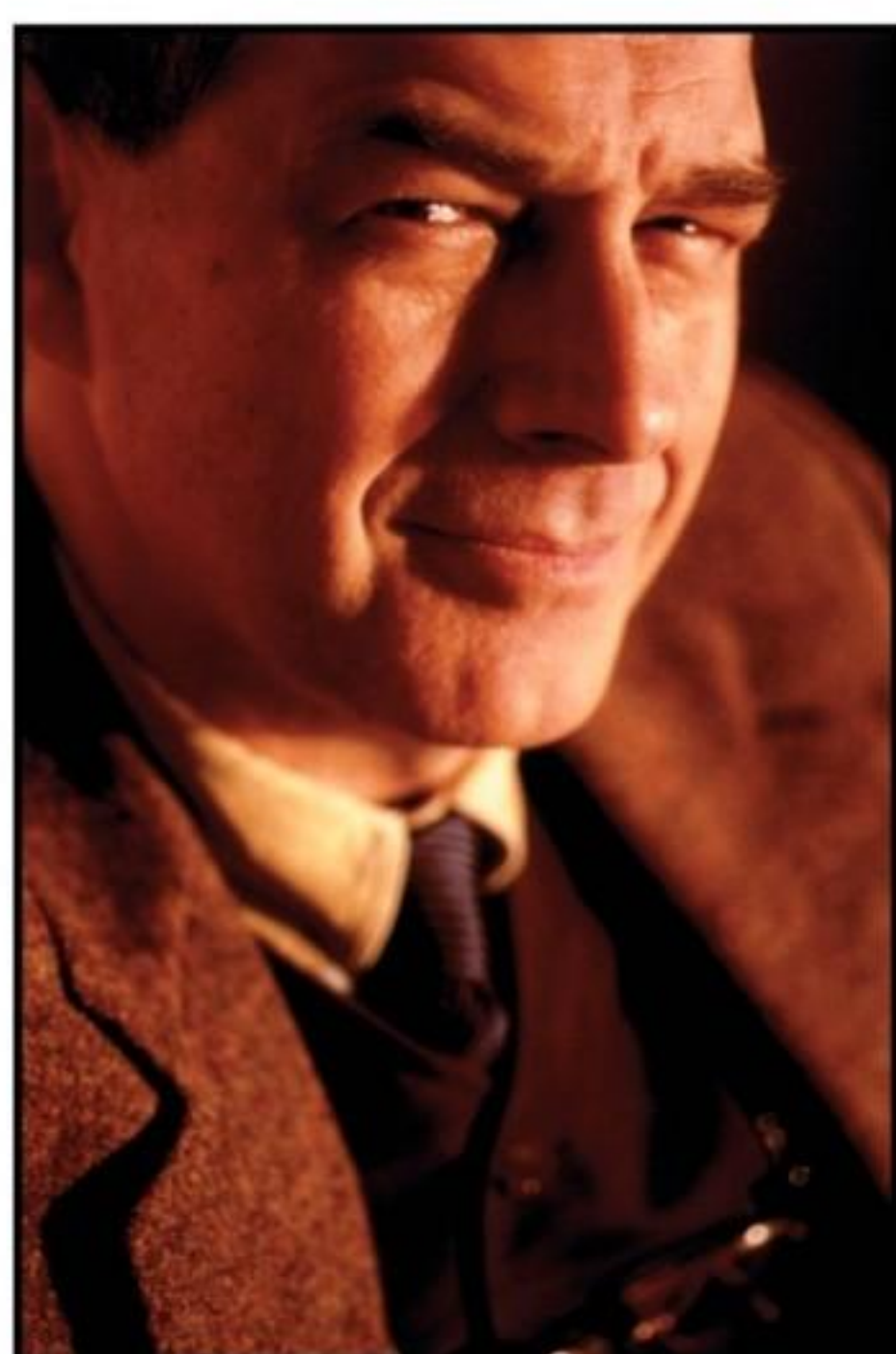
Didier Convard: Easy? It's a massive effort, you mean! There are 12 to 14 panels per page and a host of details to work on. To put the colour on one of my own pages, it takes me a day. I sweated two or three days for every page of *The Voronov Plot*! The end result: I haven't drawn anything in a year since... But remembering my childhood feelings and working with André Juillard* were well worth it!

* Didier Convard and André Juillard are old collaborators. In 1975, they drew together *The Missions of Isabelle Fantouri*, from a story by Jacques Josselin.

PROFESSOR MORTIMER'S PAST IN INDIA IS ABOUT TO CATCH UP WITH HIM... IN ANTARCTICA!



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ANDRÉ JUIILLARD

THE SARCOPHAGI OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT - Part1

JANUARY 2011

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY



YVES SENTE



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE SARCOPHAGI OF THE SIXTH CONTINENT

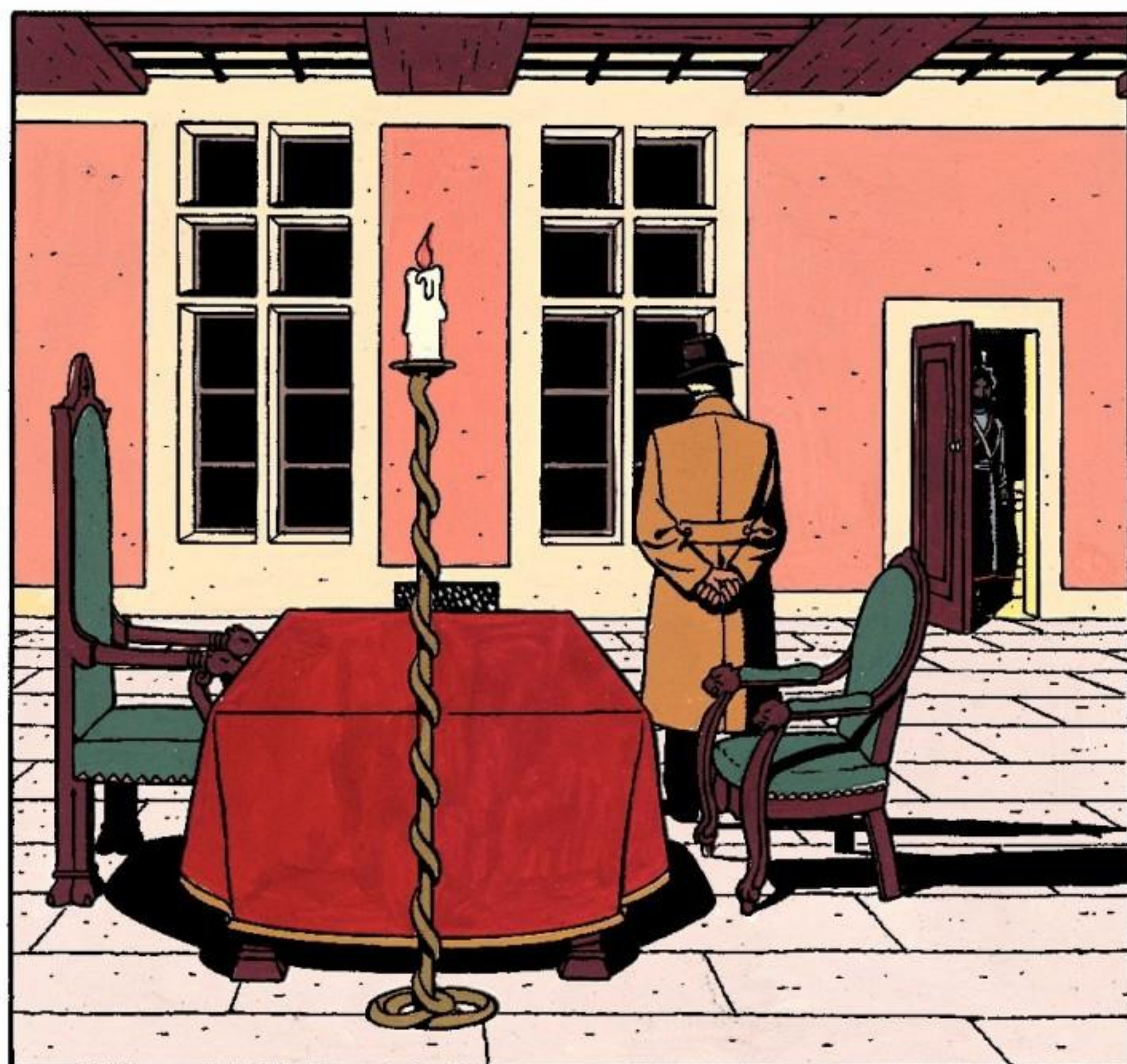
Yves Sente

André Juillard

Part 1



WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, RAJAK SHUTS THE DOOR BEHIND THE SOVIET VISITOR AND LEAVES HIM BY HIMSELF IN EMPEROR ASHOKA'S OFFICE.



Good evening, Major Varich. Please, sit down.

Good evening, your Majesty.



Construction of the base is progressing as planned.

Very good. And... the target?



I believe I have found the ideal operation ground for our first trials. You've probably heard of the World's Fair that will open in Brussels next April. What better target for a dramatic gesture intended to teach a lesson to the lesson-givers? Every Western country will be represented within a small area...



Which will allow...

BY SHIVA!

AAAAHHH!

?!



What's going on, Rajak?

I caught a phony servant listening at your window, Master. He managed to run away, but my knife didn't miss him. He won't go far. I'll have the hounds released.



Lieutenant, Na... Nasir...

What happened? All this commotion—is it about you?



By Vishnu! Don't move, my boy. I'm going to take out this knife. We'll...

N... No...



Too late... Listen to me before they arrive... Come closer...

Quick...



There! The dogs have smelled something!





We found the spy, Master. He died before he could make his way back to the city. He didn't have any papers on him. We searched the surroundings and found no sign of anyone else's presence.

Thank you, Rajak. You may leave now.



I don't like this much. A snow-storm can interfere with the dogs' sense of smell, and it could have erased other tracks. I'd better not tarry here.

Don't worry, Major. Anyway, nothing and no one can stop us now.



I hope so, your Majesty. Here, there's an article in this newspaper about the Brussels World's Fair and the team that will be in charge of the British pavilion. We've already placed one of our men inside.

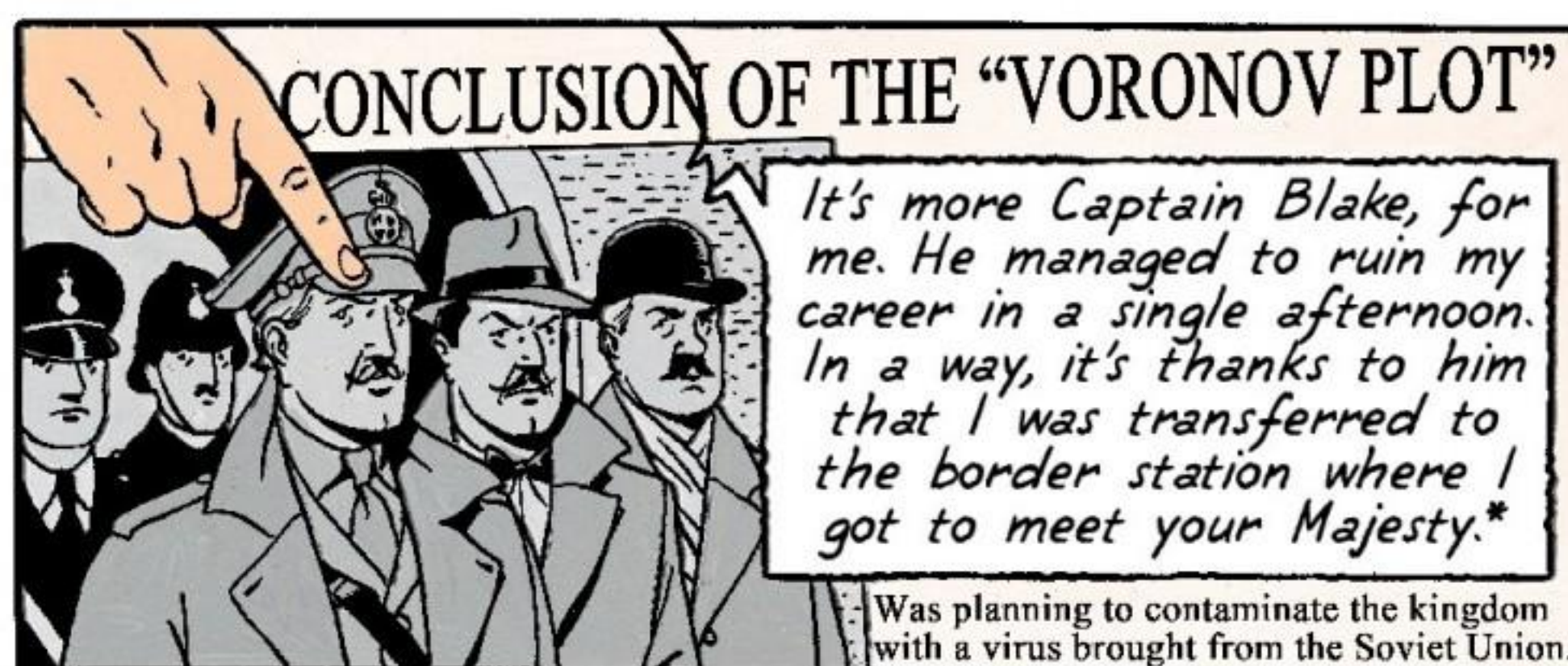


HIM!?



You know one of these men, your Majesty?

A long time ago, my path crossed that of Professor Mortimer. It isn't a good memory...



CONCLUSION OF THE "VORONOV PLOT"

It's more Captain Blake, for me. He managed to ruin my career in a single afternoon. In a way, it's thanks to him that I was transferred to the border station where I got to meet your Majesty.*

*Was planning to contaminate the kingdom with a virus brought from the Soviet Union.



Who knows?... Our project might allow us to mix business and pleasure. I just had an idea, Major...

for extremely gigantic dolls jammed by the cargo ship w. Antarctica f. radio cable colony exp.

Professor Mortimer will lead the scientific team of the British Pavilion of Industry at the Brussels World's Fair.



THE LAST MAHARAJAS HAVE LONG SINCE LEFT THE OLD VICEROY OF INDIA'S SUMMER PALACE WHEN, IN THE EARLY DAWN, MAJOR VARICH'S ZIL DÉPARTS.



THE MYSTERIOUS, AGELESS EMPEROR RETURNS TO HIS LAIR...

The time has come at last, Philip Mortimer!



My vengeance...



... will be as merciless as it was long in coming!

*SEE THE VORONOV PLOT.

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine *Tintin* was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.



Volumes published in the Blake & Mortimer series:

1. 1950 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1*
2. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2*
3. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3*
4. 1954 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1 - Cinebook N°2 - 2007*
5. 1955 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2 - Cinebook N°3 - 2008*
6. 1956 - *La Marque Jaune: The Yellow "M" - Cinebook N°1 - 2007*
7. 1957 - *L'Énigme de l'Atlantide: Atlantis Mystery*
8. 1959 - *S.O.S. Météores: S.O.S. Meteors - Cinebook N°6 - 2009*
9. 1962 - *Le Piège diabolique: The Time Trap*
10. 1967 - *L'Affaire du Collier: The Affair of the Necklace - Cinebook N°7 - 2010*
11. 1971 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T1: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1*
12. 1990 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T2: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2*
13. 1996 - *L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Francis Blake Affair - Cinebook N°4 - 2008*
14. 2000 - *La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard): The Voronov Plot - Cinebook N°8 - 2010*
15. 2001 - *L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Strange Encounter - Cinebook N°5 - 2009*
16. 2003 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1*
17. 2004 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2*
18. 2008 - *Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard): The Gondwana Shrine*
19. 2009 - *La malédiction des 30 deniers (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer): The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver*

THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



8 THE VORONOV PLOT

A Soviet rocket falls back to Earth carrying deadly bacteria. KGB Professor Voronov turns the extraterrestrial threat into a terrifying weapon that could be used to devastate the Western world—but he doesn't take into account the vigilance of Her Majesty's intelligence services. Soon, Blake and Mortimer are drawn into a lethal, shadowy war, from Moscow to London, where the stakes are no less than international peace and the real enemy may not be so obvious.



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